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FEDERAL POLICY AND ALASKA NATIVE LANGUAGES SINCE 1867

A

THESIS

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By

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Fairbanks, Alaska

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Abstract

Researchers and the general public have often contended that punishment of children for speaking their native languages in schools is the cause of the decline of those languages. But native language loss in Alaska is rooted also in the choices Natives made themselves to accept English for its social, economic, and political opportunities. Since the United States purchased Alaska in 1867, English has replaced native languages as the first language learned by children in nearly all homes. Although none of Alaska's twenty native languages is yet extinct, most are at a point of peril as English has replaced a pattern of linguistic diversity that existed from time immemorial. This study documents the history of language decline and the role of federal government policy in that process.

Congress extended federal policies to Alaska in 1884 when it established civil government in the territory. In 1885 the Bureau of Education assumed responsibility for running rural schools. Federal policy during that era grew out of America's desire for uniformity of culture, religion, and language, and as a result schools often forcibly suppressed Native American languages and punished students for speaking them. Yet Alaska Natives have been active participants in

change, not passive victims of an overwhelming bureaucracy. The switch to English occurred as Natives responded to the influx of American population with its systems of economy, society, politics, and justice. Natives abandoned their old languages when they became convinced through pressures from the outside world that English held more prestige and advantage than their native languages. Government policies defined the choices that were available, and Natives adopted English for the opportunities it afforded them in a modern system that was not of their own making. Once families began using English as the language of the home and thus interrupted the continuity of native language use from one generation to the next, the decline of native languages was assured. Punishment of school children for speaking their native languages, along with American social, economic, and political systems, created an environment in which Alaska Natives made the constrained choice to adopt English as the language of the home and community.

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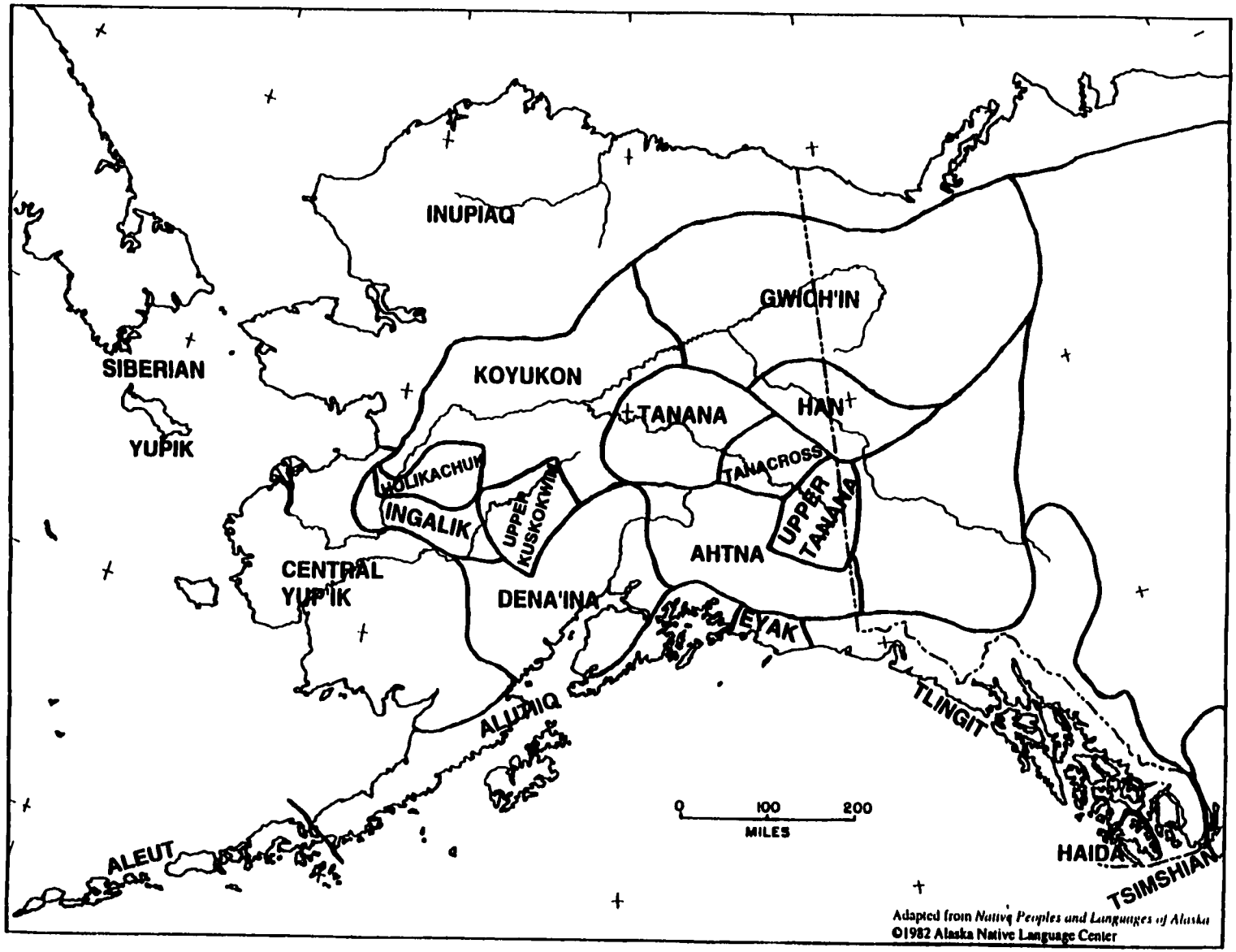

Preface

Researchers, politicians, and others have contended that the decline in use of Alaska native languages is solely attributable to punishment of children for speaking those languages in school, and many members of the media and the general public have accepted that explanation as fact. But the language history of Alaska is more complex than that. Undeniably, forcible language suppression produced serious lasting effects in people who experienced it, but it must be seen as only one factor that led Alaska Natives to make their own choices in regard to language use. Rather than passive victims, Alaska Natives have been active participants in change as they faced new social, economic, and political conditions after 1867, and the choice to adopt English as the first language of the home was a response to those forces.

Language loss is not new in human history. Alaska's linguistic past reflects a continuing process of change as certain groups, through warfare or assimilation, have influenced the speech patterns of others. Often by force and sometimes by choice, language communities abandoned old speech patterns and adopted those of other more powerful or prestigious groups. The modern language map of Alaska

represents the winners and survivors of a struggle that continued over a period of thousands of years.

Yet the future of the twenty native languages remaining in Alaska has never been so clouded as it is today. Except for two Yupik villages on St. Lawrence Island and seventeen more in Southwestern Alaska,[1] English has completely replaced the native language as the first language learned by children in the home. Eighteen of the state's native languages face near certain extinction as the youngest surviving speakers range in age from early parental years to their seventies and up,[2] and young people often show little interest in learning them.

In this study I endeavor to describe how, in the 130 years since America purchased Russia's former colony, the indigenous Eskimo-Aleut and Athabaskan-Eyak-Tlingit language families have moved from their preeminent, although flexible, status to a point of peril as English has overshadowed a pattern of linguistic diversity that existed since time immemorial. Social, economic, and political factors played major roles in this change as modern systems of employment and government advanced northward. My intent is to show how those factors influenced U.S. federal policy in regard to Alaska native languages. Such policy was not newly created when the government took control of its northern territory in 1867. It evolved from the foundations of an immigrant country that saw language as a "band of national union," believed that the traditional way of Indian life was doomed, and worked to bring the products of its own civilization –

education, private land ownership, and Christianity – to the continent's aboriginal tribes. The activities and influence of the various Christian missionary societies and their relationship to the federal government are also major parts of the story.

The key issue is not the federal government's policies of teaching English to Native Americans. Politicians, bureaucrats, educators, linguists, and Native and immigrant populations themselves have largely agreed throughout the nation's history that speech and literacy in the common language of American society were not only desirable but necessary for all citizens. Rather, I wish to document the history of federal policy toward the languages spoken by America's aboriginal tribes and describe how the government extended those policies to Alaska.

Alaska Natives have not been the victims of an overwhelming invasion that forced them to abandon their ancestral languages and convert wholly to English. Certainly many teachers, missionaries, and government agents represented that element of force, and the record shows a disturbing history of punishment and abuse. But language suppression was never universally applied, and many of those involved in education incorporated native languages in both religious and secular teaching. Alaska Natives chose their own pattern of adaptation to the sudden unstoppable flow of western social, economic, and political institutions into their lives. For many, education and the English language were keys to the doorway of opportunity in the modern world. Moreover, as the years passed, Natives

understood that those skills were indispensable in their efforts to defend their rights as minorities within the larger nation.

From our late-twentieth-century perspective, it is easy to use a broad brush to paint all federal government agents and all white citizens of a long-past era as villains for failing to see what we know to be true today, that Native American languages have intrinsic cultural and linguistic value that should be preserved rather than suppressed and destroyed. But that view is modern-day ideology, not accurate history, and we must strive to present events of the past in their proper context. It is unfortunate that for so many years, federal policy reflected the opinion that native languages were remnants of a barbaric culture that was headed for extinction. The Americanization of Alaska occurred within the context of the melting pot, and the men who formed federal policy at the time were motivated by a need to achieve cultural unity out of a diversity of immigrants and Natives. To them, providing Alaska Natives with a government-sponsored education was a liberal humanitarian effort to bring the Natives peacefully into modern society, as opposed to the brutal wars that had recently been concluded in the West. One hundred years later, it is easy to blame policy makers for failing to see that their efforts to assimilate Native Americans into a society that was divided by racial prejudice and segregation was an impossible goal. But people cannot escape the assumptions of their times, and in the 1880s and 1890s the nation as a whole ignored the possibility of cultural pluralism and multilingualism. Educators and

policy makers of the time knew that those options existed, but their choices were constrained by the realities of a society that demanded uniformity as defined by English-speaking Protestant Christian majority traditions. Agents of the federal government, operating within the limits that circumstances placed on them, chose to disregard bilingualism as a possibility for Alaska Natives, and Natives themselves were forced to make choices regarding the use of their languages in their homes.

After 1900, the government began its slow turn away from forced assimilation. Public opinion continued to equate the common national language, English, with patriotic citizenship, but the idea that Native American or immigrant populations could maintain their ancestral languages for their cultural value while also embracing English began haltingly to take root. After a truncated attempt to begin bilingual programs in the 1930s, the nation made its first lasting efforts to incorporate such notions into federal policy and practice in concurrence with the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s.

This study explores the history of Alaska native language loss as it unfolded within the broad theme of U.S. federal policy in regard to Native Americans and their languages. The first chapter establishes a framework by stating the problem through the eyes of some Alaska Natives. The interviews suggest that the legacy of language loss is substantial. Many Natives recognize the connection between their ancestors' languages and their own distinct minority cultures, and they feel a sense

of loss when that language is missing. Language is a marker of both individual and group identity, and many Natives express their belief that awareness of unique cultural traits is an essential part of healthy human development. It must be stated at the outset that the study of language, culture, and identity is a huge academic field all its own, encompassing aspects of anthropology, sociology, and linguistics. As such, it is far beyond the scope of this study even though many of the people interviewed in Chapter 1 express a personal recognition of language as an element of their own identity. In this work, however, I deal with that subject solely on an anecdotal level and leave to scholars in other disciplines any conclusions about whether and to what extent language, culture, and identity are related.

The realization that the switch to English occurred in large part because previous generations chose to stop speaking the native language to their own children in their own homes hardly makes today's reality more bearable for those who have no knowledge of their grandparents' first language. No one questions the rightness of the government's determined efforts to teach English; many Natives express bitterness and resentment, however, when they consider the loss of their own aboriginal languages. Why did such a loss occur? What is the historical context that produced such feelings? Above all, why did federal policy makers, educators, and oftentimes Native people themselves fail to consider bilingualism as an option even though they knew that competence in two languages was possible?

In order to understand present difficulties, we need to look at past events, and therefore chapters 2-8 explore Alaska's linguistic history up to the present. This history begins with an overview of Alaska language prehistory and the period of Russian occupation (1741-1867). It also examines the origins of American Indian policy and the federal government's early commitment to using the public schools as vehicles for delivering the elements of modern civilization to the continent's first inhabitants. The federal presence in Alaska had no real impact on the territory's Native population until 1884 when Congress established civil government under the Organic Act. From that point on, Alaska native languages were continually undermined, and the effects are heard in the voices of Natives today.

Alaska Natives abandoned their old languages when they became convinced through pressures from the outside world that English held more prestige and advantage than their native languages. Much of that outside pressure was through federal government policy which worked long and hard to Americanize the Indians and to, in the words of one commissioner of Indian affairs, "force them to abandon" the elements of their cultures. Traditional Native life stood in the way of America's expansion across the continent and its efforts at the same time to forge "one homogenous mass" from a widely diverse population. Federal policy makers generally regarded aboriginal languages as relics of tribalism that would only hinder Natives' progress toward civilization and full participation in the modern

world of commerce and industry. Those ideas eventually changed, but by the time the nation came to understand the value inherent in the rich array of Native American languages and took steps to foster bilingualism, it was already too late to preserve most of them as the first languages of homes and communities. Federal policies and practices alone are not responsible for the loss of Alaska's native languages. A variety of factors contributed, but the focus of this study is the history of the government's complex, often contradictory, involvement in the process.

Acknowledgments

Every researcher benefits from the work done by pioneers in the field, and in the study of Alaska native languages no scholar has broader shoulders than Michael Krauss who as both linguist and historian is responsible for a vast amount of documentation and publication in and about all twenty languages. I am a fortunate beneficiary of his thirty-eight years of scholarship, and am greatly appreciative of the hours of personal attention he has afforded me since I began this project. Judith Kleinfeld has been an invaluable source of advice and encouragement. Her knowledge of the methods of research, her familiarity with sources, and her experience in the field of education in Alaska helped me to define the purpose of this study and to narrow its focus. Terrence Cole has continually forced me to consider the historical context for all the events I have reported in this

study. I greatly appreciate the thoroughness with which he read the manuscript. His refusal to allow generalities and assumptions to go unchallenged has improved it immeasurably. Phyllis Morrow has provided an anthropologist's perspective to this study, emphasizing the need to bring out the complexity of every issue and recognize that nothing is so simple as it appears on the surface. Her skill at organizing content helped to keep the manuscript focused on the subject at hand. I wish also to express my appreciation of the late anthropologist Linda Ellanna who encouraged me at the beginning stages of this project and whose knowledge of northern indigenous cultures and dedication to teaching are sorely missed. Historian Claus-M. Naske read two drafts of the manuscript, and I am grateful to him for his many very helpful comments and his suggestions of books and articles, which provided valuable background on issues related to minority groups in America. Also, anthropologist Lydia Black helped tremendously not only because of her extensive research on Russian America, but also because of her perspective on language, culture, and nationalism and her knowledge of the literature on that subject. I am grateful to Steven Jacobson and Lawrence Kaplan of the Alaska Native Language Center for the insights they have given me based on their many years of teaching and research and for their willingness to share their knowledge. I thank Phyllis Fast, head of the UAF Department of Alaska Native Studies, for her careful reading of the manuscript and her many helpful comments. To the twenty-two people who consented to interviews for this project and who answered my

questions with patience, sincerity, and honesty I express my deepest gratitude. And lastly I thank my wife Kathy who makes everything possible.

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1. The total population of these 19 villages, according to the latest available estimates, is 6,481. The two on St. Lawrence Island are Gambell, 504; and Savoonga, 494. In Southwestern Alaska they are Akiachak, 440; Atmautluak, 250; Chefornak, 310; Eek, 240; Kasigluk, 405; Kipnuk, 457; Kongiganak, 286; Kwigillingok, 264; Manakotak, 367; Napakiak, 298; Newtok, 190; Nightmute, 145; Nunapitchuk, 366; Quinhagak, 470; Toksook Bay, 401; Tuntutuliak, 290; Tununak, 304. Source: *Inuit Nunait Nunangit Yuget Unangan Tanangin* (map) (Fairbanks: Alaska Native Language Center, 1995).

However, the total of all St. Lawrence Island Yupik speakers is about 1,300, and the total of all Central Alaskan Yup'ik speakers is about 10,000. Source: Michael Krauss, "The Indigenous Languages of the North: A Report on Their Present State" (paper presented at Eighteenth International Symposium, Taniguchi Foundation, National Museum of Ethnology, Osaka, Japan, November, 1994), 7.

2. Michael Krauss, "The Indigenous Languages of the North: A Report on Their Present State," 34.

Chapter 1

The Situation Today

In a period of time not much longer than the life of the oldest living Alaska Natives, English has replaced nearly all of Alaska's aboriginal languages as the primary means of communication in homes and communities. None of the languages that were spoken in Alaska in 1867 is yet extinct, but after only a few generations following the U.S. purchase from Russia, a single dominant language has become, for the first time ever, the first language spoken by children in the majority of families. Alaska Natives' reactions to this phenomenon are as varied as one would expect after such a fast and thorough change. Feelings of loss and regret are common but by no means universal, and no one can claim to arrive at anything approaching a consensus of Native opinion on the subject of language loss.

The history presented chapters 2-8 of this paper is centered on federal government policy and is noticeably lacking in any Native point of view. While federal records represent the perspective of bureaucrats and politicians, people's memories of real-life experiences tell us the depth of their feelings and the impact official policy had on everyday lives. As a researcher, I was fortunate to find a number of people in and around Fairbanks Alaska who were willing to discuss

their experiences and opinions about native language loss and thus add a human dimension to the history of U.S. federal policy. Their memories provide a view of where we are today; the written record reveals the chronology of events that led to that point. Interviewees were of all ages from their late teens to their eighties and represented nearly every language area of Alaska. They were people who care about native languages and have some personal interest in learning, teaching, or maintaining them, and most have been involved in some way in various language programs offered by the University of Alaska Fairbanks, the public schools, or local social service organizations. All acknowledged the difficulty they face in preserving what remains of the native languages, especially now when children even in the remotest areas of Alaska are exposed to English through television and the attractions of popular culture beginning at the earliest age.

The shift to English occurred as native language continuity from generation to generation was disrupted in the home. Linguistic researchers Robert Levine and Freda Cooper concluded in their 1976 study of native language loss in British Columbia that so long as the predominant language of the home was the native language, and so long as the parents continued to speak the native language to their children, the younger generations maintained it as their first language even if they later also acquired English. However, if the pressure in the home favored English, it was certain that the children would prefer this new language and adopt it as their

primary means of communication.[1] Evidence shows that this trend prevailed in Alaska as well.

Pressure to adopt English came from all directions as modern American systems of employment, politics, law, religion, property, and education advanced further into Alaska in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Native Americans heard the message from school teachers, employers, and the public in general that the language of their homes and families was inferior and must be replaced by something claiming to be more civilized and useful. These pressures favored abandonment of native languages over bilingualism, and the choice to shift to the new language often occurred so quickly that elders were left unable to speak to their own grandchildren.

Remembering School Days

Forcible suppression of Alaska Native languages in federal schools is only one of many factors that contributed to the shift to English, but the practice unquestionably left many Alaska Natives with vivid memories of their early school experiences. In many cases, punishment for speaking a native language produced resentment. Irene Solomon,[2] who was born in Tanacross in 1939, said that harsh physical punishment at first made her rebellious and all the more determined not to learn the English taught in the classroom. Her family lived a traditional subsistence lifestyle, traveling according to the seasons, and she spoke no English when she

entered the primary grades at the Bureau of Indian Affairs school in Tanacross. She recalled that a teacher laughed at the Native students and would mimic their accents and pronunciation of English words. Still, however, Solomon and some of the other students continued to use their Tanacross Athabaskan language. She recalled a pattern of rebellion and punishment.

> We got a lot of whipping and beating for it. We rebelled and didn't learn. I didn't participate in learning. They used to use a ruler and yardstick and beat us with it because we spoke our language. I remember feeling that I had done something wrong and that this language was something to be ashamed of. I didn't have much respect for people in authority. I became very quiet and timid, and that was true of many of the other kids in the village, too. They became very withdrawn, solitary. I believe that's a result of the abuse we took. People in the village then were using Tanacross in the home, and when we were forced to say things in English, things weren't clear. A lot of us ended up very private, isolated individuals.

Solomon said that it was not until she was nine years old and was placed with foster parents in a home in Tacoma, Washington, that she became literate in standard English and received the education she needed.

Kenneth Austin[3] had similar experiences with punishment in early grade school. Born in 1934 in Hoonah on Chichagof Island west of Juneau and raised by grandparents and an uncle who was a clan leader, Austin learned to speak Tlingit as his first language. He recalled hearing tribal stories, legends, and history from his grandparents and uncle in Tlingit while his parents spoke English to his brothers and sisters in their home. By the time he entered first grade in the BIA school, he had learned a few English words and phrases from his older sister but still spoke primarily Tlingit. He recalled that physical punishment for speaking Tlingit extended even outside the classroom and onto the playground.

> One of the teachers, Mr. Twitchell, was an Eskimo but he acted white. The rest were whites from outside. The policy was 'Don't speak Tlingit' or you would get hit on the hand with a ruler. They hurt us, even on the playground. I was always getting into trouble. Everyone at one time or another got slapped on the hand. It was shocking.

Later Austin moved to the BIA boarding school at Mt. Edgecumbe in Sitka. There the rules against speaking the native languages were enforced as well, but he and his Tlingit classmates continued to use their language secretly in the dormitory and outside the school buildings. "We established bonds that way. Other Tlingits

spoke slightly different dialects, but the language was a way of bonding. We stuck together even though we had left home."

Punishment for speaking the wrong language had its effects even on students who did not experience it directly but saw it inflicted on friends and classmates. Lorena Williams,[4] who was born in Noatak and grew up speaking both English and Inupiaq, said that her most vivid memories of punishment in the BIA school she attended are of classmates having a plaster-like material put in their mouths for speaking Inupiaq and sometimes wetting their pants because they did not know how to ask in English to be excused from the classroom. Such humiliating experiences have their lifelong effects, she said, not just on individuals but on entire communities as well.

> Kids were punished for speaking Inupiaq. Some kids peed their pants because they couldn't say 'May I please go to the bathroom' in English. So instead of saying it in Inupiaq and getting more punishment, they would pee their pants. Those kids are still alive. It's not forgotten. It's a lifetime effect. There's still a lot of hostility.

Lorena and her husband Whittier Williams,[5] who were both born in the 1930s, say that memories of such punishment are the main reason that they and others of their generation chose not to speak the native language to their children in

the home. It was a matter of wanting to protect them from the pain and humiliation they experienced themselves in school. Whittier was the son of a Quaker missionary helper in Kotzebue, and his first language was English, although he also became fluent in Inupiaq. He grew up around other missionary families and he recalled that he always knew without being told that English was the dominant language of the church and school. After seeing the punishment inflicted on his friends and classmates for speaking Inupiaq, he decided for himself to use only English, and that decision carried through to the choices he and Lorena made as parents. "It was so traumatic to see my peers being punished," Whittier said. "So Inupiaq was history. That's why we spoke English to our own kids."

Another long-term effect of such abuse is the decision by many Native people to avoid involvement in the affairs of public education and the schooling of their own children. The memories of Native people are strong enough that they still associate the schools with ill-treatment and being made to feel ashamed of who they were. Whittier Williams said that he has seen the pattern repeated many times in the public schools in the Kotzebue area. "There hasn't been much parental involvement in the schools. Kids were abused, and then when they become parents the school asks them for help and participation and they say, 'No way, after the way you treated us.'"

Punishment of children for speaking their native language continued well into the 1960s, even though by then attitudes among educators had begun to change and

bilingual education was in its formative stages. Theresa John,[6] who was born on Nelson Island near Toksook Bay, spoke only Central Yup'ik when she entered the Nightmute BIA school in the early 1960s. She recalled a distinct feeling of confusion at being disciplined for speaking the language that came to her naturally and easily. She was forced to stand in a corner or in a hallway facing a coat rack for long periods of time. "I remember wondering what I had done wrong," she said. "I didn't understand what I was being punished for." She had great difficulty communicating with teachers in a language so foreign to her, and it was not until the fifth grade that she understood enough English to slowly begin to read. Even though hers was the first generation in her community to speak English, John explained that she and her peers never questioned the need to learn and use the new language. It was simply "something the government said we had to do." Parents were mostly left out of the process of education, and as a result, John added, they never understood their own role in the system or the value of homework.

Researchers Levine and Cooper concluded that among the people they interviewed in British Columbia, the principal factor responsible for the loss of native language – the reason for the disruption of intergenerational language continuity – was the practice of punishment in the schools. They found evidence of beatings and deprivation of food which resulted in "a sense of helplessness among most of the pupils ... from which the only escape would be a satisfactory effort to avoid all use of the Native language in conversation." Levine and Cooper

suggested that any attempts to attribute responsibility for language loss to factors other than the schools' restrictive policies have "a considerable body of contrary evidence to explain."[7]

Another researcher, Celia Haig-Brown, explored the history of Indian education in Canada and concluded, like Levine and Cooper, that Native children and their families were strongly influenced by the school system. However, Haig-Brown expanded the theory by adding the influence of social and economic advantage. Native children, she observed, "consciously or subconsciously ... recognized that the culture which defined them and their parents was not acceptable to the dominant society around them." Parents, meanwhile, also accepted this power of the dominant society and sent their children to school with the hope that education would provide opportunities and advantages for their children.[8]

These influences prevailed in Alaska as well, and they contributed to the decision made by many families to begin speaking English in the home. Gwich'in elders Simon and Bella Francis raised five children on the Porcupine River and sent them to school in Canyon Village in the 1950s and 1960s. Simon[9] spoke only Gwich'in until 1950, when he began working as a carpenter in Fort Yukon and needed English in order to do his job. Bella,[10] who was raised by a Gwich'in woman and her Swedish trapper husband, grew up speaking three languages – Gwich'in, English, and Swedish – equally well. Both Simon and Bella revealed

that as parents they felt intense pressure from the school to speak English to their children, and while now they regret their decision, they believed at the time that it was the correct thing to do. They felt that education was vitally important to their children, and the schools convinced them that total immersion in English, both in school and at home, was the key to success. As punishment for speaking Gwich'in, the children were kept after school and sent home with a note to the parents. "The note told us to talk English to them," Bella recalled. "They said that when they talk two languages they can't read English well enough." Simon and Bella made positive choices regarding language use in response to rapidly changing conditions and in consideration of the best interests of their family at the time.

Simon and Bella's son Charlie[11] remembers bringing those notes home when he was about eight years old in the early 1960s. The schools were very effective, he said, in creating in the people a feeling that their own language was inferior. Today Charlie remembers practically nothing of the Gwich'in language and he sees no value in trying to preserve or teach it. It is just a part of a dying lifestyle, he explained bitterly. It is no longer possible to live off the land in the customary Gwich'in way. "You can't make a living out there now because the moose population is so far down. I don't encourage kids to learn [the language]. You can't turn the clock back; you can't change what's done. That's past; forget it; that lifestyle is gone." For him the Gwich'in language is inseparable from traditional Gwich'in life, and without one the other is not worth saving.

Bella Francis recalled that during the 1950s and 1960s, when the switch from Gwich'in to English was occurring in her area, many of the older people spoke only the native language. These elders found the lack of communication with their grandchildren hard to accept, and the parental generation was caught in the middle. "It was hard trying to explain to our grandmas that our kids spoke English," she explained. "Kids tried to talk to them in English, and the old people didn't like it. It was no good for the kids. They lost lots that way."

Monica Murphy,[12] who grew up in a family of Central Yup'ik speakers and then learned English when she began school in Alakanuk in 1960, said that she and her friends began to use the new language among themselves when they discovered that they could communicate in a "secret language" that the elders did not understand. Her Yup'ik-speaking grandfather encouraged her to learn as much English as possible because he believed it was necessary for success in the world. Today her nieces and nephews in the village all speak English, and she frequently observes how the older people are frustrated when they find that they cannot communicate with their grandchildren to tell them the things they ought to know. Murphy feels that she and others of her generation are fortunate because they can function fully in both worlds, but the children are missing a lot because they do not know the language of their grandparents. "I think the kids understand some, but they can't articulate it."

Murphy said that she does not remember any punishment or excessive force used in her BIA school, but the teachers all strongly encouraged the children to speak English. Beginning school was a frightening experience, but in the 1960s the need for knowledge of the new language was practically unquestioned in her village, and the children of Murphy's generation grew up to use English almost exclusively in their own homes. "My brother and sister speak English to their kids," she noted. "It's just easier for them. I don't know why, but they have a hard time with Yup'ik."

Laura Sanford[13] is one member of the older generation who values her English skills simply because she knows it is the only medium of communication she will ever have with her younger relatives. Born in Mansfield Village in 1928, she is the youngest sister of the late renowned Athabaskan Chief Andrew Isaac. Tanacross was the only language spoken in her home, and she knew no English when she started school at age six in Tanacross just south of Mansfield Village. She recalled that the village had a BIA school and an Episcopal church, and that the wife of the Episcopal priest was the teacher of the school.

> Most of the kids went to school lots, but my Mom and Dad were old and wanted to stay in Mansfield. They didn't understand about education. We would come to Tanacross so I could go to school. When I would talk in our language the teacher would pound the desk

> with a ruler and say 'No! Talk English!' Then we started to pick it up, but we still didn't talk English in the village. Then I started to read a little better and would take a magazine with me to Mansfield and read that and pick up the language. We were shy and felt we had to learn English. We felt we had no choice. She threatened to make us stand in the corner. So when we talked to our teacher or preacher we talked English, but not when we talked to each other. She made me feel scared and sad because I didn't understand English.

Native children who went away to boarding schools had even more exposure to the English language than children who attended village schools because they were removed from any influence of the native language community. Boarding schools operated by the BIA at Eklutna, Mt. Edgecumbe, and Wrangell were conducted entirely in English, and after extended periods of time there many children found it difficult to return to using their original language. Nina Alexander,[14] who was born near Tanana on the Yukon River in 1925, spoke exclusively Koyukon Athabaskan as a child traveling with her family on the trap line and to fish camp, but today she has entirely forgotten her native language. Her family placed her in an orphanage in Tanana at age seven when her mother died, and then two years later she went to the boarding school at Eklutna where teachers enforced an English-only policy.

Living in Nenana today, Alexander has good memories of her years at Eklutna, saying that the students were never mistreated and that she felt that it was her home. Besides their regular studies, girls were taught cleanliness, health habits, and housekeeping, while the emphasis for boys was on job skills. She explained that with Native children from a variety of language backgrounds, English became the common language among students. In fact, she said, groups of Eskimo children who spoke their language among themselves caused hard feelings because the other students thought they were talking about them. Many students began to think of the school as their home. "I would watch kids come in the fall and they were crying because they were homesick," Alexander recalled. "Then in the spring they were crying because they didn't want to leave school."

Alexander's experience at boarding school was a positive one for her and she cannot recall being punished for speaking Koyukon. Factors such as social acceptance and the need to communicate with people from a variety of linguistic backgrounds contributed to her switch to English. Still, the loss of her language has had its long-term effects. She said that today she feels left out in groups of other elders who still communicate regularly in their native language.

> I feel like I'm missing out on so much. I'm just left out. They're having so much fun and then they try to explain things to you and they're still laughing but it's not as funny when they say it in English.

> And when they sing the hymns in Indian, you feel like you're missing out on something. I'd feel more like an Indian if I knew the language. I'm very proud to be Native, but I'd feel even prouder if I could speak the language.

The experience of boarding school had a variety of effects on Native people, but its one universal influence was immersion into the English language and American culture. Adeline Raboff[15] spent only one year at the school in Wrangell in the mid-1950s when she was nine years old, but she has clear memories of the ways in which the system worked to change ingrained native customs. Raboff spoke only Gwich'in until age five, but then lived for one year in Fort Yukon and for two years in California where she learned English. She then moved back to Fort Yukon and attended the BIA school there before being transferred to Wrangell. She remembers teachers at both Fort Yukon and Wrangell as being very strict about using only English in the classroom. The difference was that in Fort Yukon the children could get away from the influence of the teacher after school on the playground and in the community, where they continued to speak Gwich'in; but at boarding school, Raboff said, students were constantly supervised and were expected to change their social as well as their linguistic habits.

> When I was at Wrangell, this matron told us we were Athabaskan. I said I was Gwich'in. She said, 'Stupid Indian, she doesn't even know what kind of Indian she is.' It was hard on kids. In the cafeteria they came around to make sure we ate all our food. We hated peas and spinach and we were divorced from all our native foods.

Raboff recalled, however, that many of the children her age who returned to Fort Yukon from Wrangell and Mt. Edgecumbe in the 1950s and 1960s were changed by the boarding school experience and had a huge impact on the village. Elders were shocked, she said, to see them dressed in the fashion of teenagers of the time and playing rock-and-roll music. "It was an affront. The kids who came back started talking about how dirty and ignorant the people were. So in one year's time all the teenagers – one generation – was suddenly transformed. And that's the generation that spoke only English to their own kids."

After her year at Wrangell, Raboff spent the next sixteen years in California where she spoke only English. She was determined during that time, however, to hold on to her native language, and today she uses it as much as possible. She said that many of the people she grew up with now speak only English and some are still too embarrassed to speak Gwich'in. The children of that era were influenced not only by the school system, but also by factors such as the church and the increased presence of the Air Force in Fort Yukon. "The mentality was that white

is right," Raboff suggested. "They knew more about everything including God, and the people just went along with it. So everyone made a concerted effort to speak English in the homes."

She placed much of the responsibility for the loss of the language on parents who stopped speaking the language to their children. Many thought their children needed English to succeed in school and that the native language would interfere with that success. There was no recognition of the concept that students could use both languages equally well. "There's a tendency to want to blame other people," Raboff observed. "The community may have been coerced, yes, but they agreed with it and went along with it."

Others who attended boarding schools are proof that one need not abandon the native language completely in order to succeed in an English-speaking education system. Many are astonished that anyone could lose the ability to speak their first language. Walkie Charles[16] remembered the boarding school in Wrangell as being military-like in its discipline and regimentation, yet he never lost his native Yup'ik. He said that even after twenty-six years away from his home village of Emmonak he is still fluent. "Those who choose to forget will forget. But it's my way of holding onto my identity as a Yup'ik. If a language is ingrained, there is no way you can forget it."

Similarly, Kenneth Austin[17] attended the Mt. Edgecumbe boarding school and then spent most of his adult life away from his home village of Hoonah. When he

returned to the village after a career in the Army, the elders were shocked to hear that he could still converse in Tlingit just as if he had never left. Nearly everyone his age and younger spoke only English, but Austin had remained determined not to lose something that he considered to be such a vital part of his identity. "How can anyone forget their first language?" he asked.

A Sense of Loss, Frustration, Regret

Laura Sanford explained that language differences make her sad even to the present day, but now the sadness comes because she can't talk to her grandchildren in the language she knows best. Native children have to receive a good education in the public schools, she said, but they must also be given a solid education in the traditional ways of their people so that they don't lose a sense of pride in their heritage. She intimated that her great fear is that as she grows old she will forget her English skills and no one will be left for her to converse with in her original Tanacross Athabaskan.

> It's important for our children to understand our language. Just because we talk English we can't throw away our own language. If I get really old and forget English, I have to have somebody I can talk to. We're losing our Indian heritage. We don't learn out of books. Our elders tell us stories, tell us how to live and what to do. That's how we

> learn and we need our language to teach it. If my kids don't understand my language, I feel a loss and I feel lonesome. If I can't talk to my own grandkids in my language, I feel sad.

Other elders expressed the same remorse, and they worry that their language will only decline further unless parents and communities increase their efforts to teach it to the very young. Trimble Gilbert[18] of Arctic Village said that he didn't start speaking English until he went to Fort Yukon for the first time in 1951. To him the native language is still a vital part of Gwich'in life even though he sees the necessity of English as well. Learning the new language was a matter of choice for him when he decided that he wanted to join the activities other children were enjoying at the Episcopal mission. Then in 1958 he began a 23-year career in the National Guard and English became an everyday requirement. The biggest change in Arctic Village came, Gilbert noted, when school teachers arrived in the late 1950s and conducted classroom activities in English. He remembered that he and his wife spoke only Gwich'in in the home and that his young son did not want to go to school because of the difficulty he had with the new language. Now, he said, families in the village speak English to their children in the homes, and as a result the young people have no knowledge of Gwich'in. His own grandchildren can't speak it, and he believes that with the loss of the language the community is left

without the easiest and most natural means of passing on traditional knowledge, the kind of knowledge that makes the Gwich'in a distinct group of people.

> Our language was very strong. Children would visit the elders and they would tell stories about the raven and wolverine, and they would catch on. Now so many kids graduate from high school and they have nothing. It's sad to see. The elders are good people and honest and they worked hard all their life. This is the way they teach us. When we're out in the bush, that's when we listen and learn and we never forget. My Mom says English doesn't mean much to her, but our own language is kindly; it's close to our heart. In that country where I live, the whole area – the mountains, creeks, and lakes – when somebody says where they've been, we know right away by the Gwich'in names. They know every hill and river and they never get lost. When they see something, they tell about where they saw it and all the people know where that place is.

Gilbert has, however, seen some reasons to be optimistic about the future of the language. Many Natives upon reaching young adulthood suddenly become aware of the absence of much of their cultural identity, and they express sorrow, regret, and even anger because of the loss of their linguistic heritage. Such feelings

are healthy, he suggested, when they translate into action toward teaching the language in the homes, schools, and communities. "We're trying to get back on track," Gilbert stated. "You can't leave your culture behind. This new generation is getting back on track."

Ivan Peter-Raboff[19] is one member of this new generation who feels exactly what Gilbert described. Born in 1976, Peter-Raboff went to school first in Arctic Village and then in Fairbanks for the past seven years. He knows some Gwich'in but not enough to speak fluently, and he said he feels bothered and frustrated when his grandfather talks to him in the native language and he has to rely on the help of translators. The native language is still very much in use in Arctic Village, but everyone there under age twenty has been raised in an English-speaking environment. The older generations made the change in order to prepare their children for life in the broader American society, and many of the people Peter-Raboff's age are wishing now that they had been taught the native language first and English second. The transition occurred very quickly within families, with only one generation separating speakers of two different languages. Peter-Raboff understands the pressures people were under and the reasons they made the choices they did, but he said that the loss of the language has left him feeling that one of the most important links to his heritage and his cultural identity is missing. The loss made communication between the younger and older generations slower and

more cumbersome, Peter-Raboff observed, and the choices people made to adapt to the new system brought inevitable changes.

> The people were under so much pressure. They knew they would have to deal with these Westerners, and as they were going through all that their children were having more contact with Westerners. They taught English to us because they saw it as necessary to deal with the modern world and opportunities, and as that generation had kids the younger people had no memory of a Gwich'in-speaking tradition. So now most people under twenty can't hold a conversation.

By the time Peter-Raboff entered school, the pressures he referred to were not the result of outright suppression of the native language in the school or punishment for speaking it. Arctic Village in the 1970s still had native-speaking children, along with early bilingual programs in the school and teachers who were sympathetic to the language. Yet the Gwich'in language still declined to the state that Peter-Raboff describes today. In recent times, the factors have increasingly been associated with social, economic, and political prestige along with advances in transportation and the electronic media, which have brought the non-Native English-speaking culture into every home.

Like Trimble Gilbert, Peter-Raboff recognized the intrinsic value of Gwich'in place names in the Arctic Village area. Native names are reminders of the close ties between nature and culture, and of the people's knowledge of the landscape and resources surrounding their home. Even for people who are not fluent in the native language, place names have both practical and symbolic value. "We don't have English names for many areas," Peter-Raboff explained. "I don't have any other way to tell people where I'm going to hunt. It holds together our feeling of community within the village."

Some Natives who never learned the language of their ancestors expressed frustration and regret as they recognized how closely connected the language is to their cultural heritage, but felt that the language remained out of their reach because of the sheer difficulty of learning it. Will Mayo,[20] whose mother is a speaker of Koyukon Athabaskan, was raised in Fairbanks and has known only English since childhood. Now in his forties, he said that he has studied the language but often feels it is hopeless to try to learn it from books, without the opportunity to practice it with native speakers in the natural setting of the home and community. There is no place left where Koyukon is the primary language of everyday life. He is also struck by the sense that since childhood he has been missing out on something that is central to his identity as an Athabaskan.

Mayo attributed the loss of the Koyukon language to several factors, mostly surrounding the people's acceptance of the idea that the white man's world and the

language associated with it would dominate all of life in Alaska. There was also for many years a feeling of shame, he said, when Native people were taught that their culture and everything associated with it was inferior and uncivilized.

Because Koyukon is no longer spoken in family and community settings and children are not learning it as their first and primary language, Mayo is not optimistic about the future. His experience of trying to learn it as an adult has taught him that classrooms and books can never replace the natural learning process that occurs in the home. "There's a deep place in me that's unhappy because I don't know my native language, an unsettling sense of loss."

Mayo's mother, Agnes Moore,[21] now recognizes that there is no substitute for the home environment for language learning. "I made a big mistake raising my kids," she said. "I didn't talk Indian to them. It's too bad that I didn't. It's got to be spoken in the home when people are young." Moore was born in Tanana and spoke only Koyukon Athabaskan when she started attending the BIA school there. She recalled, however, that she and the other children learned English quickly after an initial period when it was difficult to communicate with the teacher. There was always the fear of punishment. "She would get on our case. She would use a ruler on us, slap our hand with a ruler to remind us not to talk our language. It was kind of scary, this white woman with a ruler. I didn't understand what was wrong with us talking our language."

Moore left school after the fifth grade and lived in outlying areas with the family of her older brother. It was at that time that she started noticing major changes in the economic and social environment surrounding her home. Tanana, at the confluence of the Yukon and Tanana rivers, was a major transportation center, and an influx of non-Natives brought increased use of the English language.

> It seems like after the Depression people just started talking English. There were airplanes and outboard motors going all over the place. More white men coming in all the time, so everybody started speaking English. It was a really big thing for people to talk the white language. The girls started marrying white men. It just keeps going on. All our blood is fading away. ... I remember when I was small, coming back into Tanana, the white men were really something. I wanted to sound fancy so I started talking like them.

In 1951 Moore moved to Fairbanks to raise her own family. She enrolled in classes at the University of Alaska and later became an alcohol and drug abuse counselor and social service worker. She said that her native language has always been a vital part of her even though it was not the language of her home.

> It's so much fun to talk your language. You can make things sound less harmful. Some things sound comical in Indian and don't hurt people's feelings, but you put it in English and it doesn't sound funny. That's why I miss my brother so much. We would get together and laugh so much.

Both Moore and her son Will Mayo[22] recognize the left-out feeling that language differences can engender in the same family. Even when there is a common language such as English that serves well as a means of communication, the native language can still exist as a cultural connection that one generation within the family holds close and the other misses. Mayo said,

> I remember my Mom and other ladies talking together and they would laugh and laugh. I would say, 'What's so funny, Mom,' and she would say, 'Oh, it wouldn't be funny in English.' I always felt left out. There was an early sense of loss and it wasn't just that I was missing out on the fun. I knew there was something more important, something much bigger that I was missing out on.

Moore admitted that she gets "so envious" when she observes Alaska Native groups that have managed to teach the language to the youngest generation. She

mentioned dance groups from places such as Gambell and Savoonga that come to Fairbanks for cultural events. "Some of the Eskimo young people talk their language," she said. "I wish my kids were like that. When we get our young people together, they don't speak it because they don't know how."

Looking back, many Natives regret the decision they made a generation or more ago to stop using their language in the home. Bella Francis[23] said she wishes now that instead of going along with the pressures brought by BIA teachers she had continued to teach her children in an all-Gwich'in household. "If I could do it over again, I wouldn't listen to them when they said 'speak English.' The government spoiled everything."

It is common among adult Natives who speak only English to wish that their parents had used the old language in the home and to regret that they had not made more effort to learn it as a child, even though they understand the factors led their parents to switch to English. Martha Demientieff,[24] who was born in the Alutiiq village of Kanatak on the Alaska Peninsula across Shelikof Strait from Kodiak Island, observed that with the broad ethnic mix represented in her community in the 1930s, the only language common to everyone became English. Her mother was an Alutiiq Eskimo married to a white fisherman. The language of their home was English but Demientieff recalled that her mother spoke Alutiiq intermittently, especially with visitors. In addition, there was the strong influence of Russian through the Orthodox Church as well as a variety of languages spoken by

commercial fishermen. Demientieff remembered her mother singing to her in Alutiiq and although she did not recall the language itself, the emotions that went with it were still clear in her mind. "It was obvious to me that my mother was happy when she was speaking her language and she sang lullabies to me in her language. It was a lifelong mourning for my mother that I didn't speak the language. It's the language she loved us in and comforted us in."

For eight years beginning in 1941, Demientieff attended the Catholic boarding school in Holy Cross. There, as in her home village of Kanatak, English became the only common language among a community of people with varied linguistic backgrounds. Students came from all over Alaska, and English was the only language allowed in the classroom. Demientieff and her brother and sisters were the only students from their area, but she recalled that the native language was a comfort to other larger groups of children far away from home. "I remember kids talking and singing in their language," she said. "Kids grouped together, and especially when they were homesick that's when they would sing and talk in their language."

Thirty-five years passed before Demientieff went back to Kanatak and heard Alutiiq spoken again. English was the primary language of the village, but her older relatives still spoke Alutiiq among themselves. She described the feeling as one of knowing she was close to the family but not quite being able to participate

fully, both because she had been away for so long and because she did not know the language.

> I could feel my mother's presence. It was like looking through a window and seeing something you want but not being able to touch it. It was like recognizing a tune but not knowing the words. I could catch a few words here and there, and I knew the names of food, but my relatives did not know me. Some of them spoke to me in Alutiiq, testing me to see if I really belonged to them. But my uncle scolded them, saying, 'It isn't her fault she doesn't speak the language.' It was hard to figure out where I fit. I felt like a handicapped person, but I felt their love. I also felt their pity.

The Need and Desire for English

The decision made by families and communities to abandon their native languages in favor of English was not the direct result of punishment or force. Certainly, countless individuals were compelled to speak exclusively English in school, and the influence of BIA teachers carried beyond the classroom, but no government policy or law ever had the power to regulate the language of the home. Ultimately the decision was the result of proactive choice at the family level. At

some point in nearly every home and village in Alaska, parents and children came to accept English as the language of status, prestige, and advancement..

Walkie Charles,[25] who grew up speaking Central Yup'ik in his home village of Emmonak, said that his family was exposed to the need for English early in his life because his father needed it in his job as custodian and cook at the local school. His teachers in elementary school in the village insisted that the children use only English, and when he was sent to the BIA boarding school in Wrangell beginning with the eighth grade in 1970, English was the language of everyday use both inside and outside the classroom. Charles said his mother strongly supported the education system, was fascinated with her children's knowledge of English, and wished that she had been able to go to school herself. The village of Emmonak changed quickly when children began to return from school with a thorough knowledge of English. The people simply became "more comfortable" with English, Charles recalled, and they saw it as the means for getting jobs and living a more comfortable life. The rewards made English more appealing than Yup'ik, and as a result the loss of the native language was certain. But the practical purposes of the new language do not diminish the cultural values of the old in Charles's estimation. He believes in a purpose for both but says that everyone should be allowed to make choices based on individual needs. "Today we need to speak English, but we also need to remember our story. It's fearful if people lose their language, but please don't expect me to speak that language if I don't want to and

if there is no practical purpose for it. I'm sure if there was a purpose, people would hold onto it."

Charles also said that social pressure to use English has often been so strong that people have been embarrassed about the use of their native language. Others have expressed that emotion as well. Oscar Kawagley[26] now considers himself lucky to have been raised by his grandmother in a Yup'ik-speaking home, but acknowledged that for many years he was convinced in his own mind that the native language was inferior to English. That feeling began as soon as he started school and was punished for speaking Yup'ik. "It was the first time I had ever been hit in the hands," he said. "Many recesses I spent writing on the blackboard 'I will not speak Eskimo in class.'" With such constant strong reminders that the language of his home was deficient and a barrier to learning, Kawagley began to accept the superior status of English and felt ashamed that his first language was Yup'ik. When he entered the University of Alaska in Fairbanks in 1954, his Yup'ik language became even less important in his life. "After four years here, I was so convinced that our Yup'ik ways were so primitive that I didn't even teach the language to my children. Now I realize the mistake I made. Later they asked me why we never taught it to them."

The mistake, Kawagley now believes, was in allowing himself to forget how closely his language is associated with the standards and values that give Yup'ik people their identity. Speaking before an anthropology colloquium at the

University of Alaska Fairbanks in the fall of 1995, Kawagley, an associate professor of Education at the university, explained that one's sense of self means belonging to a people and understanding the unique world view that is inherent in such belonging. The loss of the language was destructive to that sense of self.

> My grandmother believed that when she gave me the ancestral name *Iniukuk*, then the spirit of that name came into me and was part of me. So I was not born with a clean slate. The spirit dwelled in me. Rituals and roles and the values necessary for continued existence, they make survival possible. Sharing, cooperation, and giving something back when we take something, respect for the earth – we lost that balance with the community and with the natural world. Outsiders said our way was wrong. All of a sudden our spirituality was no good. We began to believe we couldn't think for ourselves; let the government do it for us. Our self, which held us in good stead for thousands of years, was broken up.

Still, Kawagley is like other Natives in his recognition of the reasons that English was so thoroughly accepted. Aside from the feelings of shame and embarrassment, there was the valid perception that knowledge of the new language was necessary for success in school and the world of employment. Today people

realize that their mistake was not in learning English, but in allowing it to completely replace the native languages in the contexts of home and community. It should not have been an all-or-nothing decision; both languages have their place in native life. Jerry Isaac[27] of Tanacross observed that Alaska Native people need standard English in order to function in modern America, but that the native language remains an intrinsic part of their life as well. Isaac, who spoke almost exclusively Tanacross Athabaskan until he began school in the 1950s, also remembers the embarrassment felt by children his age when younger children with better skills in English made fun of them. For his generation, English was an adaptation to changing conditions. Education, the church, and the cash economy were all factors in the community's decision to adopt the new language. He noted that it was not because of force from any teachers or school policies that he felt compelled to speak English, but because he understood that the new language was a necessary part of the changing world.

Tanacross was altered drastically by the construction of the Alaska Highway during World War II, by the presence of the Army, and by the growth of the nearby non-Native community of Tok. Old Tanacross lay on the north side of the Tanana River, opposite the highway and the military airstrip, but as Laura Sanford explained, soldiers crossed over to the village for dances and to buy beadwork. By the late 1950s, a high school was built in Tok, and children from the village were required to cross the river and take the bus to school. An increasing amount of

English was thus brought into the community, and soon after that the entire village was rebuilt on the south side of the river only about twelve miles from Tok. Jerry Isaac recalled that use of the native language fell off fast as children brought their English skills into the home and parents recognized the social and economic rewards of the new language.

Laura Sanford[28] said that when she started her own family she continued to speak Tanacross Athabaskan to her children even though she understood the need for English as well. The family moved permanently from Tanacross to Tok in the mid-1950s when her husband took a job with the Alaska Road Commission. The oldest of her seven children was fifteen at the time of the move, and they were educated in the all-English environment of the local school district. Sanford remains discouraged today at the continuing loss of Tanacross language and culture. She recognizes that Natives themselves must share the blame for the loss and that they have the power to save the language by making the decision to speak it to their children.

> We're losing our Nativeness. We're becoming more like white. With every generation our kids marry white people. It's the same way with our language. Every generation speaks it a little less and pretty soon we'll lose it. But if we don't talk it to our kids, it's our own fault.

The need for English is rooted in both economics and politics. Kenneth Austin explained that in the case of his home village of Hoonah, Native people realized that the world outside the village offered job opportunities and mobility, and that success required the use of the language of commerce and employment. Commercial fishing was the most reliable source of income for the village, but even that was seasonal work and people sought jobs in Juneau, Sitka, and Anchorage to supplement their income. "They become urban," Austin said. "They lose contact with other Tlingits, and they lose their language." Politically the structure of the Tlingit village changed as well, going from the traditional clan system to the Western style city council and mayor. The people found that they had to deal with Juneau, and the language of bureaucracy was, of course, English. More than anything, Austin observed, those factors led to an increasing need for education and a command of the language of economics and politics. The status of Tlingit declined as people saw tangible rewards for their knowledge of English.

Researchers in the field of language loss have often concluded, as Kenneth Austin did, that Native people consciously and deliberately chose to adopt English as they recognized the social, political, and economic advantages associated with the language of the dominant society. Linguistic researcher Guy Lanoue observed that the Sekani of northern British Columbia had made the switch from their native language to English in the 1940s and 1950s, at a time when they were still

relatively isolated from white contact. Lanoue concluded that for the Sekani political unity was the major factor. It was their desire to be part of a "pan-Indian" movement, the unification of Natives into a common political front, that necessitated the switch the new language. As the white world advanced closer to their homeland, the Native response was to give up certain traditional aspects of their "self-definition" and instead "deploy a type of unity," a new identity based on characteristics shared with other Natives. English thus came to preserve the idea of Native brotherhood and allowed the Sekani and others to "arrive at a shared definition of themselves." The new language is, Lanoue decided, "an instrument that maintains the new identity the Sekani have been forced to adopt if they are to remain Sekani."[29]

Linguist Norman Denison suggested that the correct term for the process by which languages fall into disuse should be "language suicide" rather than "language death." A language disappears because of a loss of speakers when parents decide to stop transmitting it to their children and when "children are no longer motivated to acquire active competence in a language which is lacking in positive connotations such as youth, modernity, technical skills, material success, education." The minority languages are displaced by languages of higher prestige, Denison wrote, and "in this sense they may be said to 'commit suicide.'"[30]

However, in Alaska today there are many examples of Native people who are determined not to forget their first language and who see the advantages of

maintaining it along with their skills in English. Theresa John[31] considers herself fortunate to be bilingual because it enables her to participate fully in both worlds. Her fluency in standard English allows her to function in the urban social and academic environment, while through the Yup'ik language she is able to maintain her connection to her people and their cultural values. The combination is one that she would like to see available to all Native people. It provides access to a distinct cultural philosophy and world view while at the same time it opens the way to opportunities in the modern economy.

Television

While forcible suppression in the schools along with factors such as social stigma, the need for mobility in the job market, and the influence of Christianity all had their effects on native language loss, the phenomenon mentioned more than any other as the underlying cause of the shift to English is television. Certainly many children lost their native language before the invention of television, but advances in communication technology over the past twenty-five years have brought TV, the English language, and American popular culture into every household in every remote village in Alaska. Television is the most powerful selling tool yet invented, and the native residents of rural Alaska are no more immune than anyone else to its commercial message. The culture associated with television is based on consumption of material goods. Personal wealth is promoted

over sharing and community; stories are presented for entertainment by producers and actors who have no interest in their audience other than as consumers of commercial goods; and the language of wealth and status is exclusively English. The medium of television and the message it brings have amplified all the forces that have worked against the use of native languages in Alaska.

"TV came into being and that was it," Irene Solomon[32] said in referring to use of the Tanacross Athabaskan language in her home. To her it was the culmination of many factors that had worked together to the detriment of traditional community life. The move across the river to the new village site was a cultural shock as people went from one-room cabins to modern two-bedroom houses. "Now we had oil heat and didn't have to gather firewood and go to one place to get water," Solomon recalled. "The things that kept us interacting were taken away from us, so the language also became less important."

Television was one of the main factors that kept the people from interacting and thus interfered with the traditional social fabric of the native community. It is a passive individual activity that stifles conversation while promoting a lifestyle that appears to be exciting, glamorous, and attainable but really bears no relationship to the world people live in. Solomon said that with the introduction of television, the native language simply seemed to lose its value to the community. "I didn't place any value on it [the language] then myself. It was not important enough to speak it to my kids." She explained that her grandmother lived with the family at that time

and continued to speak the native Tanacross language. Her children learned a few words because the grandmother insisted that they understand, but their primary language continued to be English. Today Solomon and her children all regret that decision. "I wish I had encouraged my children. They now say I should have taught them."

But television is not the only medium that is having such an effect. Along with music and movies, it is part of the broad sports and entertainment industry that pervades American popular culture and, according to Jerry Isaac,[33] is working to the detriment of native values. "We need to preserve our language so our people are bilingual and speak it and use it," Isaac said. "You need to actually be a speaker. Our kids today don't understand it. They understand that music from 'Guns And Roses,' but we need to get them to use our language in stories, songs, poetry."

In Agnes Moore's[34] opinion, television has been detrimental to conversation and a sense of community, but it has also been more effective than anything else in persuading young Natives to turn away from the traditional values and customs of their culture. "That TV is no good. When you visit people now their eyes are just glued to it. Everything is geared to white people. They want to be like white people." The damage caused by alcohol and drug abuse and the dependence on welfare and other government entitlements are the effects of cultural loss, she said. "It makes me mad. The government is putting up all kinds of housing, moving

people into town and giving them food stamps and welfare. They don't have to haul water and cut wood. Some of them are full-blood Indian and they can't speak their language."

To Moore the language is integral to Koyukon life, and she believes that if children could speak it they would have something to help them resist the damaging aspects of American popular culture. "Because our kids can't speak the language, they go toward the white culture. Our subsistence lifestyle is gone, but if they spoke our language they might feel they're not weak. That part is important."

Ivan Peter-Raboff[35] explained that the drastic changes brought by television are obvious to him. Rather than spending time speaking the language of their elders, Native children are isolating themselves for long periods of time passively taking in American popular culture. Trimble Gilbert[36] of Arctic Village also recognized the barrier that television and American culture are placing between Native children and the traditional values and customs that their elders lived by. Even so, he expressed great hope for the future and sees many positive signs that young people have a renewed respect for their own heritage.

> There's too much of the modern world, TV and stuff. Now we're trying to get back on track. You can't leave your culture behind. There is so much money, and it has caused a lot of problems. Now for the last few years elders are being listened to more. People are sorry they

don't speak their own language, and some are really mad. Alcohol and money have done so much harm.

His optimism for the future of the younger generation is based on giving children a firm grounding in the philosophy and values inherent in native culture along with a solid modern education. He believes, however, that some of the best opportunities for native language learning are to be found outside the classroom. "Kids should have both languages and do something with both cultures. Half and half: the Indian way and white man's way," he said, adding that children should interact with elder speakers of the language both inside and outside the school setting.

Others are not quite so hopeful. Kenneth Austin[37] suggested that television is such a powerful medium that it could be used as a way of teaching native languages in homes and schools. But he is aware of the difficult realities as well. "Today you walk into any house in Hoonah and they're all around the TV," he said. "If they could use that and the computer to teach . . . but that's a dream I guess." He admitted that he is continually frustrated with the leadership of organizations such as the Alaska Native Brotherhood, a non-profit corporation representing the interests of Southeast Natives, because every year it passes resolutions favoring the teaching of the Tlingit language to children. "Everybody applauds it one hundred percent, but after the convention nothing gets done." He

argued that schools and communities should start classes and do everything they can to persuade parents to make sure their children attend the classes consistently. "Little boys and girls can really catch on quickly. I know they can learn. But I'm not optimistic because of funding priorities. They say, no, we need basketball and travel money for basketball teams. They pay lip service to the language and culture, but that's it."

Teaching Native Language in Communities and Schools Today

The plain difficulty involved in learning a language is a source of frustration to many adult Natives. Since most Alaska languages have no active speaking community, opportunities for learning in a natural environment are practically nonexistent. Will Mayo[38] expressed the frustration involved in trying to learn from language textbooks with the inevitable and unavoidable technical linguistic terms. Speaking at a session addressing the issue of preserving native languages at the June, 1996, meeting of the Denakkanaaga Elders Conference in Nenana, he said,

> I don't know what a fricative is and I don't really even want to know. What I need is to go to a village and live with a family for three years and insist that they talk to me like a baby only in Koyukon: 'Go get water; go get wood.' I'm convinced that's the only way to truly learn a

language, talking every day just the way God intended, between parents and children.

Many of the parents of today's children are of the generation that attended school in the years after the introduction of bilingual education in the early 1970s. Those bilingual programs were transitional in nature, seeking to move Native children smoothly from speaking primarily the language of the home to speaking primarily English. Transitional bilingual education programs failed to stop the decline of native language use, and when seen in conjunction with the concurrent proliferation of television and other forms of mass communication in rural Alaska, the past quarter-century is a period of continuing loss of Alaska's linguistic heritage. The focus now among educators, parents, and concerned members of the general public is on how to stop the loss. Most agree that schools and communities will have to pool their resources and create innovative language learning opportunities. The goal is to make native language a vital part of native life while mastering skills in English as well. The programs and policies of the past have proved to be inadequate.

"Bilingual programs have never worked," Oscar Kawagley[39] declared. "They're too based on the Western way of teaching language. You have to take into account the orality of native language, and it has to be in the context of the community. Parents are the most important. The school can't do it by itself."

But others such as Theresa John[40] acknowledged the difficulty of involving the parents of today's young children because those parents are the generation that experienced schooling only in English. "Kids bring home Yup'ik homework and the parents don't know the language," John said. "And that's making the parents feel uncomfortable. The school system didn't include Yup'ik a generation ago."

John agreed with those who believe that the greatest chances for success lie in immersion programs that begin at the earliest age possible; if taught correctly, the native language will be a complement to English, and students will master skills in both. The goal for a Yup'ik village, she contended, should be to maintain the Yup'ik language in order to establish a strong Yup'ik foundation to build identity and self-esteem. "All that is important to who we are," she said, adding that people need that sense of belonging.

> The Yup'ik language is real. It's the Yup'ik spirit of a person. There are many things that are part of being a Yup'ik and the language is one of them. Some say that without the language there is no history and we will lose the things that identify who we are and where we came from. Those who have lost their language are living with a borrowed language. It's somebody else's.

The value of community support for the school's native language programs was emphasized repeatedly. Monica Murphy[41] said that she sees no way that the schools can do the job without the active support of the community in settings outside the classroom. "You can't learn the language in school. You can learn to write it but not actually use it." The key, she added, is in persuading parents to be role models by learning the language if they don't know it and using it every day in the home. She advocated a goal of encouraging Native children to be bilingual, with a good command of standard English as well as full fluency in the language of their people.

Whittier Williams[42] also recognized the need for immersion programs in the schools and community support for language learning, but he is continually frustrated by the lack of positive action coming from the people themselves. He observed that in the Kotzebue area, native language use has diminished with the increasing dominance of the modern economy and the job opportunities it brings. Besides television, the two major impacts in the past twenty-five years have been the business climate established with passage of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971 and construction of the Red Dog zinc mine. "Everything you try to do is by English," Williams declared. "Everything that the system brought is done by the European way. So there was that English push before we started realizing we were losing Inupiaq."

His frustration comes from the failure of the community and the schools to establish any meaningful Inupiaq language learning programs even though educators, parents and community leaders continually make promises. "Our corporation always passes resolutions on the importance of speaking Inupiaq," he noted, "but as soon as they leave the meeting room, they go back to speaking English. It's like a joke." He said that immersion programs taught by Inupiaq speakers are needed in the schools, and they must be reinforced by parents who use the language every day in the home.

Martha Demientieff,[43] as a Native woman who earned a teacher's certificate and taught in a rural school, has a special understanding of the connection between language and identity. In her years of teaching in Holy Cross she encountered students from a wide variety of linguistic backgrounds and found consistently that students looked upon their language, no matter what it was, as a characteristic of their individual personality as well as a marker of the larger group they belonged to. It's important, she said, not to take that away from them, and it's equally important to teach them to be literate and fluent in standard English. "The most important part of language is how it makes you feel," she explained. "In the classroom it's important not to displace a child's way of speaking. That's part of how he feels about himself. When we tell them that's no good, we're telling them that they're no good."

In rural schools, the native language should be given the same status as any other subject, Demientieff concluded. Schools that treat it lightly in ten minutes a day are sending the message that it isn't on the same academic level as math and English. Native elders should be brought in and they should receive a high level of status, respect and pay within the public education system. "I don't understand the mindset that says only English is valid," she said. "Kids can have both. We should make the schools more Native, using Native teaching methods, visual, hands-on."

An example of how such traditional Native teaching methods can be used in language learning was provided by the respected elder David Salmon[44] of Chalkyitsik. As a child, Salmon was sent to the Episcopal orphanage in Fort Yukon, where English was the only language allowed. He never forgot his original Gwich'in, however, and to him the language is still a symbol of strength and a far better means than English to explain the unique world around which Athabaskan culture is built. Success for Native people today depends on a solid grounding in their customs, traditions, and values as well as the best schooling available. "It's the white man's world, so we have to speak their language," Salmon explained. "English is the number-one language. It's a changing life and they need jobs and skills."

Yet at the same time, Salmon sees the Gwich'in language as the people's link to their identity as a distinct population with a proud heritage. Children are no longer learning it in the home, and Salmon fears that it will be lost completely if

parents and community members rely solely on the schools to teach it. He noted that classroom programs only teach about the language, not how to use it in everyday conversation. For that, students must get out of the classroom and into the village where parents and elders use the language to teach them traditional skills such as making snowshoes and sleds and tell stories incorporating the names of the lakes, rivers and mountains surrounding them. Students have to see the practical use for the language, Salmon added.

> The wrong way to teach the language is in the school. Move the classroom out to the village. Then we can go down to the lake. That's where we can talk our language. We can't talk our language inside. If I talk about cutting a tree inside the schoolroom, they can hear the words but they won't really understand. After you understand the language you can explain the culture, how we live. Then you feel like an Athabaskan. Go down a trail; you can point to the lake, build a fire, make tea. That's the language, but in the school they can't understand. They can learn quick if you get them outside the school. We can talk about digging the roots when we're out there. There's language there. But just sit in the schoolhouse they can list the words but they don't know how to put them together and use it and understand. You got to see it.

To David Salmon and other elders such as Laura Sanford,[45] the native language is inseparable from traditional life, and the most meaningful place to teach it is within that context, where the language is directly relevant and practical. Sanford said that the best teaching environment is in a setting such as her home at Mansfield Village north of Tanacross. There, she suggested, children could go for periods of time to learn from elders who are using the language to teach aboriginal skills and values.

> They can go back to Mansfield and live in the traditional way, our potlatch and so forth. We go out to get roots, hunt rabbits, get ducks, all the food and all the berries, set snares for caribou. We make a meat rack for dry meat and share it with all the families. ... We don't learn by writing. All Natives learn by watching and listening and by telling stories.

Still, Native leaders at all levels are committed to improving the quality of education for their children. All recognize that the continuing struggle for the political and civil rights of minority groups within mainstream American society depends on proficiency in the systems of government and politics. To protect their right to exist as distinct cultures and sovereign political entities, tribal groups must operate within the institutions of power. Preserving native lifeways, customs and

languages in the coming years will require that Native people have a solid education and command of the workings of politics and the courts, essentially adopting a non-native language to preserve native traditions.

Ada Deer, one of the nation's leading tribal advocates, said during a visit to Alaska in 1996 that education is fundamental to the success of all Native Americans. At the time of her visit, Deer was assistant secretary of the Department of the Interior and head of the Bureau of Indian Affairs. She was quoted in the newsletter of the Tanana Chiefs Conference.

> We don't know what challenges the future holds for any of us. But I do know after living on this planet for 61 years that it's extremely important for Native people to obtain a good education. This means a college, vocational, professional, or business school degree. Everyone should understand the challenges of the future are going to require the best training, the best minds. Therefore, for Native people to prosper there must be an all-out effort to educate the young people so they can care for themselves and take care of their families and secondly assume positions of leadership in Native communities and equally important participate in mainstream society.[46]

The most vociferous tribal advocates in Alaska agree. Jerry Isaac[47] of Tanacross said that he always goes back to his grandfather's philosophy that "you can't fight progress" and because of that his people must now rely on one of the first principles of native life: adaptability. He added that the dominance of mainstream American society and the abrupt loss of aboriginal language and culture have left many people feeling that they are neither fully Native nor fully white. Suicide, alcoholism and drug addiction are the results of this loss, he concluded. "Once you're in that in-between, you feel helpless, things are beyond your reach." But he went on to emphasize strongly that such feelings "shouldn't be used as an excuse for self-imposed failures."

Isaac contended that Native people today have the opportunity to choose the best aspects of the American system of public education and adapt them to their own unique circumstances, and language learning remains a top priority as a means of reuniting children with the best aspects of their own heritage. He and others in Tanacross are working with the Yukon Native Language Centre in Whitehorse to develop classroom materials for use in the local schools. In that way, Native people are employing professional linguists and their methods for teaching all languages and adapting those methods to their own needs in the village. Isaac charged that traditional bilingual programs are totally inadequate because in a few minutes a day they are able to teach only a small amount about the language. "You can learn words, but context needs to be taught. You have to feel it, to live it, to think it.

Everything has a connection with the language. It's intrinsic to your way of life. That's the way we have to run a language program."

Isaac Juneby,[48] one of perhaps eight remaining speakers of Han Athabaskan in Alaska, talks bluntly about the grim future that lies ahead for his people if they do not find this kind of connection to their own cultural and linguistic heritage. The people in his home village of Eagle generally have lost interest in that heritage, he explained, and as a result they have lost a sense of self-identity as well. He is easily disgusted with those Natives who place the blame for their own failures on government or other outside institutions and then refuse to take responsibility for themselves. "We can't keep saying 'the dominant society did this to us.'" Juneby declared. "We can't blame the dominant society. That's all in the past. The question now is 'do you speak your native language or not?'"

To him, the alcoholism and other social problems that are prevalent in many Native communities can be traced to the loss of tribal identity and individual self-esteem, and the route to regaining those values is through language, culture, and heritage. The three are linked, he explained, and a group of people that loses any one of them will have a difficult time retaining the other two. Heritage, by his definition, is a sense of shared history; it is "knowing where you came from." That is what so many Athabaskan children are missing today, Juneby continued, and until it becomes important to the Native population as a whole, the social problems will continue despite government-sponsored programs to deal with them.

> The kids and their self-esteem — they're not proud of their heritage. For me to be proud of who I am, I have to know where I came from. Then you can deal with the outside forces. Without that I don't think we can survive. Language and heritage and culture are tied together. I fully believe that for any people to survive, these things have to be intact. If you don't have them, you see low self-esteem. I have to be proud of who I am.

Juneby was born near Woodchopper on the Upper Yukon River. His father worked in the placer mines around Woodchopper and trapped in the winter, so the family stayed in that remote area year around, and Han was the only language spoken in his home. In 1950 at age nine he was sent to the boarding school at Wrangell for two years before returning to Eagle when the Bureau of Indian Affairs school opened there. He recalled that even though he had a late start in school, he was a good student and moved quickly through the grades, but his limited English was a detriment and for the first time he began to hear the message that native traditions and languages were somehow inferior. Juneby's generation is the last to have learned Han as a primary language, and with the decline in native language use other aspects of the culture have been lost as well. He said that his brother, for example, is twenty years his junior and does not know the native language, and traditions such as dancing, drumming and potlatching have all but

disappeared in Eagle. Juneby admitted that earlier in life he himself went through a period when he was ashamed of his own heritage, and the effects of such feelings were personally destructive.

> When I was younger I was a failure because people told me I was a failure. But now I am very proud of who I am. A lot of that was realizing my lost link. When I didn't know any better — when I was in the Army in 1963, 1964 — I didn't want to be known as an Indian. The mentality was that Indians were no good. Then once you get down there, alcohol takes over.

Juneby noted that the most frustrating thing for him is seeing how many Native people continue to blame others for their loss rather than taking charge of their own lives, as their ancestors did, and changing things themselves. Government programs intended for their benefit only make them increasingly dependent to the point, he said, where state energy assistance pays for their heating fuel and they don't even have to cut their own wood.

> I see people just giving up. What's bad is that most people are not doing as much as their forefathers did. We are a proud people. The Han had a government in place for thousands of years. My people

> believed in survival, but now the destruction in Eagle is booze. You can't let a small village like Eagle go under. That's what makes people who they are.

For him the solution lies with a return to those things that made the people strong, and that begins with a renewed awareness of traditional values, customs and language. He said that his ambition is to develop a language curriculum and to see Han Athabaskan taught in the Eagle schools. With knowledge of the language, children could also be taught other aspects of their heritage such as drumming and dancing and especially the values of hard work and sharing. But Juneby emphasized that the schools cannot succeed without the support of parents and the community. "It doesn't start at school," he said. "It starts at home. Either you do it or you're a failure. When you know what's possible, there's no limit."

Thus, Alaska Natives are directing their own efforts toward a mix of the best of the education system and the strengths offered through traditional language and culture. Mastery of English is essential to Alaska Natives if they wish to maintain and preserve the languages and other unique customs that distinguish them as a people. The switch to English occurred as Native people responded to rapidly changing conditions in Alaska and recognized their own need and desire to participate in the modern world. The varied experiences expressed by Alaska Natives reveal that the roots of language shift in Alaska go deeper than the causes

Levine and Cooper offered for native language loss in British Columbia. Adoption of English in Alaska was not the result exclusively of forcible suppression or punishment of children in the schools for speaking the native language. The shift away from the native languages was assured when pressure in the home favored English, and continuity in the native language from parent to child was interrupted. The factors that caused that pressure certainly included forcible suppression in the schools but were connected as well to American social, economic, and political systems and the federal policies that supported those systems. It is impossible to measure or quantify how heavily each of those factors weighed on Alaska Natives' decisions to speak English in their homes. However, the interviews presented in this chapter provide clear examples of the ways in which Natives came to accept English as the language of prestige and opportunity as well as a tool they would need in their efforts to ensure their own cultural survival. Punishment for speaking native languages in schools continued into the 1960s and it produced horrendous effects in countless children, but it was only one of the factors that forced Alaska Natives to make painful choices in a rapidly changing environment that was not of their own making.

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Chapter 2

The Russians

The Native people who met the first Russian fur hunters to step ashore on Attu Island in 1745 had never heard the word "Aleut." They called themselves Unangan, and the long, narrow chain of islands they inhabited stretched eastward more than a thousand miles to the place called in their language Alaxsxiŝ 'the mainland.'[1] Related distantly to the Yupik and Inupiaq people who occupied adjacent coastal areas of this mainland, the Unangan shaped their lives around the sea. It was a culture that had refined its own customs, rituals, and subsistence practices based on a harmonious relationship with the sea and its resources. Survival depended on their skill as hunters, and in their pursuit of marine mammals over the centuries they had developed the kayak, or baidarka, and had become expert at handling these small, maneuverable skin-covered boats in some of the roughest waters in the world. They traveled regularly between islands, often covering distances of up to seventy-five miles of open ocean. But while these skills had made life possible on the islands, they also attracted the attention of early Russians. The hunters and traders who rushed east from Kamchatka following Vitus Bering's 1741 voyage of discovery saw Native men as a ready source of

skilled labor and forced them to hunt the highly valued sea otter and pay tribute in furs. Over the next half-century of exploitation and displacement, the Native population of this island chain fell from at least 12,000 to perhaps 3,000 or 4,000.[2]

Language Prehistory

The language spoken by these people was also distantly related to Yupik and Inupiaq. The most commonly accepted theory today is that Eskimos, Aleuts, and Indians migrated across the narrow expanse between the Americas and Asia at the Bering Strait. The Bering Land Bridge is the most probable link by which the new world was populated with its first nations. Various tribes moved eastward from Siberia and from there spread further east and south, pursuing available resources and adapting to changing environments and conditions. Thus it can be said that the ancestors of all Native Americans once occupied the Alaska mainland.[3] Alaskan linguist Michael Krauss suggests that on the basis of linguistic evidence the Athabaskan, Tlingit, and Eyak languages extant in modern-day Alaska first appeared 6,000 to 7,000 years ago, and the origin of Eskimo and Aleut was part of the most recent wave 4,000 to 5,000 years ago.[4]

Languages evolve over time as splinter groups break away and lose contact with the main population or as linguistic groups expand and assimilate other linguistic groups. After an average of about 1,000 years of separation, the languages spoken by related groups usually become unintelligible to each other. In

the case of Eskimo and Aleut, however, the present-day divergence is most likely not the result of a definite split, but rather of the loss of intermediate dialects as dominant ancestral languages expanded over a period of 4,000 to 5,000 years until they met, having eliminated all intermediate varieties, at a line which is now at Stepovak Bay on the Alaska Peninsula. During that time Eskimo and Aleut have evolved as distinct branches of the same tree, each with its own smaller offshoots.[5] That they are descended from a common ancient language is proved through the presence of cognates, or words in two languages that come from the same word in the same common ancestral language, along with grammatical similarities. In this case, that common language is called Proto-Eskimo-Aleut, and Beringia may accurately be called its homeland. The similarity between the two branches of Eskimo — Yupik and Inupiaq — is much closer than is the connection between Eskimo and Aleut. A clear example is in the word each group uses to refer to itself (*yuk* 'person' plus the suffix *-pik* 'real' yields *Yupik* 'real person'; *inuk* 'person' plus the suffix *-piaq* 'real' yields *Inupiaq* 'real person,' where *yuk* and *inuk* are cognate, as are *-pik* and the first part of *-piaq*).[6]

Today Yupik languages are spoken in Southcentral and Southwestern Alaska from Prince William Sound to Bristol Bay and north to Unalakleet, as well as on the south shore of the Seward Peninsula, on St. Lawrence Island, and on the southeast and east tips of Siberia's Chukchi Peninsula. Inupiaq is a chain of

dialects stretching from Unalakleet up the western and northern coasts all the way across Canada to East Greenland.[7]

The other major language family in Alaska — Athabaskan-Eyak-Tlingit — originated in the area of eastern interior Alaska, western Yukon, and northern British Columbia. From there, Proto-Athabaskan expanded westward into interior Alaska and south and east to cover the southcentral and southeastern areas of Alaska as well. Linguistic evidence also indicates that Athabaskan speakers moved south into Canada, down to the coast of California and Oregon and, in a separate movement, from the plains side of the Rocky Mountains in the north to the homeland of the Apache and Navajo still further south. Eleven Athabaskan languages are spoken today in interior Alaska, while Eyak is a single language that provides a link showing the relationship between Athabaskan and Tlingit.[8]

Athabaskan and Eskimo languages each likely formed a continuum of dialects in its respective area, and today's language map represents only those that have survived an everlasting struggle for dominance. Languages and dialects have disappeared as the more powerful or successful groups have enveloped weaker ones through outright warfare or simple assimilation. Lines that mark major boundaries between languages in Alaska usually have nothing to do with topographic barriers such as a large body of water or a mountain range. Rather, they represent the points at which expanding linguistic groups met resistance from others and could go no further. The Yupik Eskimo and Aleut languages, for

example, evolved in isolation from one another and were spoken by highly successful cultural groups that spread out and subdued other languages nearby. Stepovak Bay on the Alaska Peninsula is the place where the two now meet.[9] Similarly, the eleven Athabaskan languages in Alaska represent the winners in the continuous struggle for linguistic and cultural dominance in the interior. Only these are left of the many Athabaskan language groups that must have once existed, and the line demarcating Athabaskan territory on the modern language map is the point at which both Athabaskan expansion from the east and Eskimo expansion from the west were halted.[10]

Early Expansion

The early Russian fur hunters expanding across Siberia toward Alaska were indifferent to both the linguistic heritage of the Native people they met on these islands and the integrity of aboriginal culture.[11] The Russians were concerned about profits from the lucrative trade with markets in China and Western Europe, where sea otter pelts were in high demand. Fur had been the incentive behind nearly two hundred years of Russian expansion beyond the Ural Mountains and eastward across Siberia. In 1582 the warrior Ermak crossed the Urals and his Cossack army captured Sibir' from the Tatar Khan Kuchum. Moscow soon realized the weakness of Tatar control over the entire region and moved quickly to organize a systematic conquest.[12] The Russians established a pattern that lasted through the period of

colonization of Russian America. Fur hunters armed with overwhelming strength in their modern weapons subjugated native tribes and forced them to hunt and pay tribute to their new rulers in the form of furs. Sable, ermine, and fox were the furs available in Siberia, and they brought fabulous profits not only to hunters and traders but to the Russian government as well. After the conquest of far northeastern Siberia by 1700, ventures by sea beyond Kamchatka to the Aleutians were merely an extension of that quest for riches. There the luxurious and highly profitable sea otter was in plentiful supply.[13]

This Russian push from west to east across northern Asia took place concurrently with colonial expansion in North America, and conquerors on both continents engaged in brutal treatment of native tribes. Even so, there are significant differences in attitude and intent that had an impact on Alaska Natives and the fate of their languages. Americans were determined to subdue the frontier, clear land for agriculture, and settle it for permanent occupation; aboriginal tribes were obstacles to that progress.[14] Their cultures, languages, and lifestyles were seen as relics of a barbaric past to be either swept away entirely or changed to conform with the ideas and practices of the modern world. As American historian Robert Utley observed, white settlers described Native Americans "not in observably objective terms but in terms of what whites were not. They collectivized diverse groups of Natives into a generic 'Indian,' labeled him 'savage,' and defined savagery as deficiencies, both cultural and moral, as

measured against the standards and ideals of 'civilization.'"[15] In Russia, conquerors believed that their superiority over primitive tribes gave them the right to force the Natives to pay taxes, murder those who protested, and reap tremendous profits from their lands. Historians George Lantzeff and Richard Pierce describe Russian pioneers as having "the psychology of superiority characteristic of all expansionist peoples, convinced of their right to dispossess inferior and barbaric foes, to establish the true faith, and to reap the economic benefits of dominion."[16] The Russians who came to Siberia and Russian America were hunters, not farmers, and their motivation was immediate riches, not a new home. As they moved east, they hunted each area until the fur resource was depleted and then they pushed on to new unspoiled frontiers.[17] This get-rich-quick motivation existed on the American continent as well, especially among gold seekers, but a wave of settlers always followed with the intention of expanding American freedom and democracy while transforming the frontier into a safe place for civilized society.

While American Indians were pushed away, killed or forced to assimilate, Natives in Russia were allowed to continue their traditional social patterns — including customs and language — so long as they paid their tribute and accepted their status as subjects of the Russian Empire. Payment of tribute in fur became a major source of revenue for the Russian government, but beyond that it served a symbolic purpose as well, for it reinforced Moscow's dominance over these far-flung regions.[18]

Russian historian R.G. Liapunova has suggested that the nature of Russian colonization "made it possible for the natives of Russian America to preserve their history and continue their ethnic development throughout this critical period, despite the continuous exploitation they had to bear under the new conditions."[19] Unlike America — which by the late 1700s was working to establish a distinct national identity through a common language, history, and folklore — Russia accepted the cultural autonomy of all peoples within its domain. Such acceptance was neither more enlightened nor more benevolent than the American way of doing things, but it did create a different set of circumstances for Alaska Natives than for other Native American groups. Alaska Natives' first experience with Europeans involved contact with people who accepted diversity, and Natives were not immediately forced to abandon language practices or subsistence patterns. Also, because the Russians were preoccupied with fur hunting and not with tending the land for agriculture and permanent settlement, tribal land occupancy was not disrupted as it was in America's westward expansion. Some Russian fur hunters arrived in Alaska with the intention of treating the Natives with acceptance, but most were intolerant of resistance and let nothing stand in the way of the wealth of furs available for the taking. Their sole concern was profit,[20] and those Natives who were willing to help them pursue it were allowed to continue the patterns of their linguistic and cultural heritage. Since the Russians did not intend to permanently

settle these newly discovered areas, they did not see the tribes as impediments to progress or obstacles standing in the way of civilization.

Russian expansion into Alaska began in the first years after the Bering expedition of 1741 in which the commander, Vitus Bering, a Dane in Russian service, died after his ship was wrecked on Bering Island. Crew members who survived the winter returned to Kamchatka and, with their reports of available fur resources, aroused the interest of fur hunters and traders known as *promyshlenniki*. These men built vessels from wood available in eastern Siberia, often with reindeer skin sails, and made their way across the open sea to explore the new territory and search for sea otter. A sailor named Emelian Basov returned to Kamchatka in 1744 after a voyage to the uninhabited Bering Island, and his success sparked interest in exploration into areas farther east.[21] A year later, people of the Near Islands of Attu and Agattu, on the far western end of the Aleutian chain nearest to Bering and Copper Islands, became the first Alaska Natives to experience the fur rush. An expedition led by Yakov Chuprov went ashore apparently with the intention of trading gifts, but this first encounter with Natives quickly turned violent in a dispute over a gun. Soon after that the Russians slaughtered more of the islanders following another dispute over the taking of Native women.[22] Immediately the pattern was set, with Russians forcing the Native men to do their hunting for them. Some of the Russian crew leaders, particularly Andrian Tolstykh, established a reputation for more fair and respectful treatment, but always the Native hunters

were essential to the Russians' success and the *promyshlenniki* became more and more dependent on their skills.[23]

The name "Aleut," which the Russians gave to the first people they met in the American North Pacific, is of uncertain origin, possibly coming from the region of Alut in eastern Siberia.[24] It was easily applied to the Natives who inhabited the entire chain of islands because, with slight dialect differences from west to east, they all spoke the same language and lived according to the same set of cultural norms. From their foothold on the Near Islands, fur hunters moved quickly and steadily eastward, decimating local populations of sea otter as they went. It was not until they reached Kodiak Island that they encountered a tribe that did not speak the same language as the inhabitants of the Aleutian Islands and who had had a long tradition of warfare with the Aleuts. The Koniag spoke a variety of Yupik Eskimo that extended up the Alaska Peninsula, across Kodiak Island, the southern Kenai Peninsula, and all of Prince William Sound. Their language has come currently to be known as Alutiiq, from a Russian plural form of the word "Aleut," and those who live in these areas adopted and still use the name Alutiiq to refer to themselves as a people. The language has two distinct but mutually intelligible dialects; people living on Kodiak Island and the Alaska Peninsula speak Koniag Alutiiq, while those on the southern Kenai Peninsula and around Prince William Sound speak the Chugach dialect.[25]

The Russians quickly established themselves on the western end of Kodiak as Grigorii Shelikov, an entrepreneur in the fur trade, took the island by force in 1784. More than anything, Shelikov wanted the government to grant his company a monopoly on the fur trade in Russian America. Russian Tsar Catherine the Great adhered to a strict policy of non-interference when it came to the government's role in business matters, and she opposed any such favoritism. Catherine insisted as well on fair and humane treatment of all native peoples whom the Russians encountered. After taking control of the Russian Empire in 1762 she made it clear that she disapproved of the *promyshlenniki* practice of taking tribute from the natives, and by the late 1780s she had expressly forbidden it.[26] But even with such a ban in place, there was much activity that was beyond her control on the American frontier halfway around the globe from St. Petersburg, and the exploitation continued. Moreover, the Russians never mastered the skill of hunting sea otter from the native baidarka, and they therefore became increasingly dependent on the labor of Aleut men.[27] Shelikov was mindful of Catherine's concerns and tried to persuade her that by granting a monopoly for his company she could ensure that relations with native groups would be peaceful and humane. Shelikov took an interest in the languages spoken by the indigenous residents of Russian America, and a map published with his account of the journey from Kamchatka to Kodiak clearly marked the areas of the six Alaska languages the Russians had encountered by then.[28]

Language research took a step forward in 1791 with the arrival in Alaska of a major scientific expedition from Russia led by Joseph Billings, an English sailor who had previous experience in the North Pacific while serving under British explorer James Cook. In addition to their exploratory duties and their instructions to reform the practice of taking fur tribute from the Natives,[29] members of the Billings expedition collected a considerable amount of linguistic data, including word lists by German naturalist Carl Heinrich Merck and ship's physician Michael Rohbeck.[30]

Russian Orthodox Clergy

In 1794 another event influenced the fate of Alaska languages during the Russian period. In his efforts to gain favor with Catherine, Shelikov offered to support a delegation of Russian Orthodox missionaries through profits from his own company. The offer did nothing to sway Catherine toward granting a trade monopoly for Shelikov's fur company, but in the interests of humanity she did allow a contingent of Orthodox clergy to establish themselves at the settlement on Kodiak Island. Although the first of these missionaries did nothing to promote linguistic research, the Orthodox presence within the next eleven years began a tradition of linguistic work and native language education that started slowly but began to flourish in the 1820s and continued throughout the era of Russian occupation in Alaska. This language work advanced the cause of literacy not only

in Aleut and Alutiiq, but in Central Yup'ik and Tlingit as well. Krauss has written that during this second segment of the Russian occupation of Alaska "the basic principle that Native language is important, and can and should be used in spoken and written form in the church schools was clearly proposed as a policy for that system."[31]

By the beginning of the nineteenth century, four years after the death of Catherine the Great, the government had granted a monopoly to the Russian-American Company, with Aleksandr Baranov in charge of its operations in Alaska. The company established headquarters on the east end of the island at the present site of the city of Kodiak and soon began looking toward the southeast as sea otter stocks were depleted through overhunting near Kodiak, Cook Inlet, and Prince William Sound. Like his predecessors, Baranov immediately learned the value of Native labor. Aleut and Koniag Alutiiq men were essential to Russian success, and they accompanied the Russians everywhere they went not only as hunters but also as helpers in building forts and expanding the Russians' reach in the new world. Everywhere east of Kodiak Baranov had run into competition from American and English fur traders. The company's intention was to claim the entire northwest coast of America for Russia and prohibit access to any other trading nation.[32] Knowing the weakness of his control of Russian America, Baranov took steps to solidify the Russian presence. In 1799, immediately after the formation of the Russian-American Company, the Russian population in Alaska was 225 men. From

then until the end of the Russian occupation of Alaska, that number never exceeded 812.[33] Baranov compensated for the lack of Russian manpower by employing increasing numbers of Native workers. In the years to come, Aleuts were forcibly removed to places such as Yakutat and Sitka, to the Commander and Pribilof Islands, and as far away as Northern California. The Russians became so dependent on Aleut labor that by 1820 Lieutenant Lazarev noted that "if the company should somehow lose the Aleuts, then it will completely forfeit the hunting of sea animals, for not one Russian knows how to hunt the animals, and none of our settlers has learned how in all the time that the company has had its possessions here."[34]

Such exploitation had immediate effects on Aleut community and familial life. The best hunters and most able-bodied men, the leaders and father figures, were pulled away, leaving a void in the social structure of the village.[35] The Russians loaded men and their baidarkas on ships and transported them to places far from home where sea otter were still plentiful. Tragedies often struck on these ventures, and the mortality rate was high among the Aleut hunters. Storms at sea, newly introduced diseases, cold, hunger, accidents and war with other tribes took a heavy toll.[36]

With the presence of Orthodox clergy in the colony, however, the Russians were not as free as they once were to exploit the Natives with impunity. Missionaries took increasing interest in the language and education of the Aleut and Alutiiq people. A Creole population made up of the offspring of Russian men

and Native women soon emerged, and the Russians recognized the advantage of educating both young Natives and young Creoles for service in the more highly skilled jobs associated with the fur trade as well as for service in the Orthodox Church.[37] Another significant advance occurred with the arrival in 1805 of Nikolai Rezanov at the new Russian-American Co. headquarters in Sitka. While Rezanov was a clever manipulator who had managed to become both a shareholder in the company by marrying Shelikov's daughter and a personal envoy of Tsar Alexander I, he was also committed to the cause of education for young Native and Creole Alaskans at company expense. Language was a fundamental part of Rezanov's plan for education, and immediately upon arriving in the colony he voiced his displeasure at the meager progress the missionaries had made toward learning the local native languages. In criticizing the Orthodox missionaries, Rezanov told the directors of the Russian American Company, "I shamed them for not yet knowing the American language, telling them that not only the prayers but even the sermons must be translated into the American language."[38] As a way of encouraging the monks to become more involved in learning the languages of the people they served, he compiled an extensive list of the vocabularies of six native languages — Aleut, Koniag Alutiiq, Chugach Alutiiq, Tanaina, Eyak, and Tlingit.[39]

Under Russian rule and the spiritual influence of the Orthodox Church, a distinct bilingual population developed in Alaska. Russian was the language of business and trade within the Russian-American Co., but in home and church

settings, the native languages continued to thrive. Russian Orthodoxy never demanded that its converts abandon their linguistic and cultural traditions. Indeed, according to Russian Orthodox priest Michael Oleksa, Orthodox clergy believed that aboriginal customs were entirely compatible with Orthodox religion and that Christianity was enriched by the inclusion of diverse habits, languages, and views of the world. To them, Oleksa contends, no language was superior to another in the linguistic or communicative sense. Propagation of the word of God is what mattered, and that was as viable in the native tongue as in any other.[40] Even so, the Orthodox clergy began linguistic work only haltingly after being prodded by Rezanov who recognized immediately the need to train local people to serve the company as mechanics, carpenters, clerks, and bookkeepers. With the company's help, missionary schools were soon started, and talented clergymen such as monk Gideon in Kodiak began working with Native speakers to develop teaching materials in their languages. With Paramon Chumovitskii and other students, Gideon started but never published Alutiiq dictionaries and grammars for religious use. However, this early linguistic research apparently lasted only through Gideon's three-year stay in Kodiak and received no support from his immediate successors.[41]

Ioann Veniaminov

The most influential and successful of all Russian Orthodox missionary linguists and educators to serve in Alaska was undoubtedly Ioann Veniaminov, who arrived at Unalaska in 1824. The school Veniaminov established in Unalaska conducted classroom activities in Russian and Aleut and existed for nearly one hundred years. Working with the Tigalda Aleut Chief Ivan Pan'kov, Veniaminov began immediately the task of designing an alphabet, modifying Russian Cyrillics to represent the sounds of the Aleut language. The two men collaborated on a translation of the Orthodox Catechism which was first printed in St. Petersburg in 1834 and again in a corrected form in 1840. Researchers down to the present day have credited Veniaminov and Pan'kov with beginning a tradition that extended beyond the church. Literacy, Orthodoxy, and bilingualism became part of a unique Aleut cultural identity that persisted long after the period of Russian occupation.[42] Jay Ellis Ransom, who taught school in Nikolski on Umnak Island in 1936 and 1937, suggested in an article in the *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology* that Veniaminov's Aleut writing system "made written Aleut acceptable to the island populace" and that cultural influences "facilitated its [written Aleut's] spread over enormous geographic areas, to be taken and used by thousands of native Aleut speakers."[43] Ransom wrote that the Aleut writing system soon moved out of the church setting and began to be used in community activities and all areas of Aleut life, such as letter writing and the keeping of diaries. He said that the ability to

write in their own language had "injected into the family of almost every native an atmosphere of study and a delight in the realm of the mind," and that according to his own observations the Aleuts' preoccupation with written material is "the inner altar of the family, around which revolves the circle of his religious life, his correspondence, and his daily records."[44] Historian R.G. Liapunova estimated that under Veniaminov's teaching and with the help of his writing system one-sixth of all Aleuts became literate.[45] The actual number is impossible to calculate, but if Ransom's estimate of "thousands" of literate Aleuts means that only 1,000 were alive at any particular time, and if one accepts a census count of 4,000 Aleuts in the first half of the nineteenth century, then the literacy rate was one-in-four. Russian researcher Vyacheslav Ivanov, in his 1997 study of the Orthodox church in the Aleutians, computed a literacy rate of 16 percent based on statistics published in 1844 which listed 249 literate Aleuts in the Fox Islands out of a population of 1,484 Fox Island Aleuts in 1834.[46]

Veniaminov went on to translate, compose, and publish several more volumes in Aleut, including original works entitled *Guideroad to the Kingdom of Heaven* in 1833 (published in 1840) and *Notes on the Unalaska District* in 1840. With the help of bilingual Creole priest Iakov Netsvetov of Atka, he published a complete Gospel of Matthew in Aleut in 1840 and a primer and a grammar and dictionary in 1846. But his language work stretched beyond Aleut, and his influence prompted others to do pioneering language work even after he moved to the Russian-

American headquarters in Sitka in 1834. In 1844 he sent Netsvetov to Russian Mission on the Lower Yukon in the heart of the Central Yup'ik speaking region, where Netsvetov spent seventeen years working on that language. The priest Lavrenty Salomatov succeeded Netsvetov in Atka and translated the Gospels of Mark, Luke, and John into Atkan Aleut, and in 1862 produced a Catechism in manuscript form. Meanwhile, Innokentii Shaiashnikov, who became priest at Unalaska in 1848, translated the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, and the Acts of the Apostles into Eastern Aleut. On Kodiak Veniaminov delegated the responsibility of producing language material to the priest Elias Tyzhnev who worked with Alutiiq speakers Kosma Uchilishchev and Gerasim Zyrianov to compose a primer, translate the Gospel of Matthew, and in a single volume the Catechism, a collection of prayers, and a sacred history. In Tlingit, Veniaminov was able to produce far less usable language material than he had in the three other languages, partly because of the sheer difficulty of Tlingit phonology and partly because he always felt that he was merely an observer of the culture rather than an accepted participant as he had been among the Aleuts. With the help of Russian seminary student Ivan Nadezhdin, he published a Tlingit grammar and lexicon, and Nadezhdin himself translated the Gospel of Matthew, but no other religious material was translated into Tlingit during Veniaminov's tenure in Alaska.[47]

So by the time of the sale and transfer of Alaska to the United States in 1867, Russian Orthodox missionaries had established a tradition of teaching in the native

languages and of recruiting and educating young bilingual Natives and Creoles for service both in the clergy and in skilled jobs within the Russian-American Co. In contrast to the first forty years of brutal exploitation and conquest by the *promyshlenniki*, the last forty years of Orthodox missionization produced literacy and a strong Christian presence that altered traditional religious patterns but did not diminish tribal identity. Alaskan linguist and historian Richard Dauenhauer has explained that in Orthodoxy as it was practiced among Alaska Natives, "there is no attack on a person's language. Rather, the Church sought to instill a sense of pride in the Native language and foster popular literacy in it. ... There is no attack on the culture of the individual whether material or intellectual." The result, Dauenhauer said, was the emergence of a literate bilingual, bicultural population and "the flowering of a literary tradition without parallel in Alaska."[48]

Thus the Russians created a different set of circumstances for Alaska Natives than British colonists and Americans did for aboriginal groups on the rest of the continent. The Russians' claim to Alaska was by discovery, and they believed that by means of that right alone they controlled Russian America. Anthropologist Philip Drucker concluded that "despite their maintenance of garrison forces the Russians could not honestly claim the land by right of conquest."[49] Their strength was far from overwhelming, especially in Southeastern Alaska where, after subduing the Tlingit uprising in 1802, only a few company workers along with a few Orthodox missionaries occupied the fort at Sitka. Concurrently, Indians across

the continental United States were facing continual warfare and military defeat at the hands of an expanding nation that displaced entire tribes from their ancestral homelands and took permanent possession for themselves. The defeated Indian nations were forced onto reservations, which the federal government considered to be places where Indians would be taught the skills they needed in order to become fully assimilated members of the English-speaking American society and economy. Missionaries played a role there too, predominantly in support of the government's efforts to mold a population of diverse ancestry into a single cohesive nation and to teach the literacy and vocational skills that Native Americans would need in the modern world.

Alaska Natives did not consider themselves to have been conquered in the same sense. They were neither defeated by an invading army nor banished from their homelands to make room for new settlers. Drucker suggested that the Tlingits allowed the Russians to stay in Southeastern Alaska only because the Russian trade centers were "convenient" to the Natives. He added that "during their epoch of occupation, which was never anything but marginal in this part of Alaska, the Russians made no treaties or other legal agreements with the Indians whereby the status of the latter was defined."[50]

While the Russians forced Natives into service in locations as far distant as the Kurile Islands, the Commanders, the Pribilofs, and northern California, their purpose was to exploit the Natives' skills as hunters, not to overrun their

homelands and claim those lands for settlement by right of conquest. In Alaska the Natives were useful workers and the Russians needed them; in the continental United States the tribes were in the way and were treated as obstacles to the nation's destiny. The result in either case was devastating to the victims of displacement and exploitation, but at the very least the Russians left the languages intact. Speakers of Aleut, Alutiiq, Central Yup'ik, and to a lesser extent Tlingit experienced an unprecedented level of post-contact language use and literacy. Education for those Alaska Natives was based on a conviction that American federal policy makers resisted throughout the nineteenth century: that learning — including language learning — is best facilitated in the language the student understands best.

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Chapter 3

The Founders and a Common Language

From the founding days of the republic, the adoption and use of a common language was an element of American nationalism. In the newly formed United States, as in Europe during the Age of Enlightenment, language as a cornerstone of national identity was a highly popular thought. Originating with eighteenth century German philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder and continuing with Wilhelm von Humboldt, the virtues of linguistic unity spread easily across the Atlantic where Americans with their recently won political independence were trying to build a unique and separate national character. The idea that a common language was essential to a feeling of unity within political borders went hand in hand with the belief that America must create a singular culture based on a shared literature, folklore, and history. The people who were most actively involved in the beginning of this country — the men who had more to say than anyone else about its social and political organization — subscribed to the notion that every person's cultural identity, patriotism, and nationalism were inseparable from the language he spoke. Historian Henry Steele Commager has noted that Americans just after the Revolution were eager for national unity and that it was "fortunate" that they had a

common language to start with. Soon, Commager continued, "schools, newspapers, and the pressures of an equalitarian society brought about a general familiarity with English even among those with non-English backgrounds." With that key element in place, Americans were able to concentrate on forming a political organization, a secure territory, and a sense of shared history and tradition.[1]

Yet the United States has never enacted a national language law. The willingness with which immigrant groups have customarily adopted English has made it unnecessary to establish legal demands on the use of a common language. As Nathan Glazer has written, the immigrants desired conformity, and their old world "culture and language became an embarrassment and an obstacle in the way of becoming true Americans, rather than something of value to be cherished."[2] Immigrants founded their identity as Americans partly on their use of English, and the old linguistic patterns often died out within one generation as children learned that economic and social opportunities were linked to the national language. Oscar Handlin noted in his history of American immigration, *The Uprooted*, that those who came voluntarily to the new nation understood that "to be Americanized, the immigrants must conform to the American way of life completely defined in advance of their landing." The process of immigration itself had changed them, Handlin wrote, into a population ready to accept "a new American form" made up of "the blending of a variety of strains."[3]

Alaska Natives were insulated from such influences until the late 1800s, but Indian tribes across the contiguous United States were faced with the demand for immediate change. In post-revolutionary America, the federal government financed an education system that became a vehicle for conveying the plan for cultural and linguistic unity to those tribes, and it enlisted Christian missionaries to help. Robert Berkhofer, in his history of American missionaries, wrote that "since conversion to Christ and civilization was conceived as an instructional problem, mission stations were educational establishments in the broadest sense. ... No demand [was] too sweeping and drastic in the missionaries' attempts to revamp aboriginal life in conformity with American ideals."[4] By the time Russia had sold its North American possessions to the United States in 1867, the federal government had accumulated several generations of experience in introducing the English language and American lifestyle to the Indians. The remainder of the nineteenth century was a period of rapid expansion westward, and the tribes were told to yield and adapt to the dominant society. Alaska Natives fell under the influence of U.S. federal policies when civil government was established in 1884. So even though a full century separated Alaska Natives from the nation's founders, the conviction that a single nation necessarily speaks a common language had direct effects on their lives. The history of Alaska Native language loss is the product of events that began with the founding of the new nation.

Jefferson and the Enlightenment

No one in America embodied the spirit of the Enlightenment more than Thomas Jefferson. The idea prevailed that reason, thought, and scientific inquiry provided the clues to understanding the laws of God and nature. Natural rights were fundamental because man must be free to explore new sources of knowledge without fear of disapproval from either the church or the state. That philosophy translated into the notion that the new world was the land of promise physically as well as ideologically. Americans were in a privileged position with a new country and an entire continent on which to expand and put their ideas into practice. Man's capacity for reason gave him a dominant position over nature and fostered the opinion that the universe was there to serve man's purposes. The notion that it was America's destiny to occupy and dominate the entire continent as a single nation was born early with independence. The founders recognized their place in history and saw their country as the shining example of Enlightenment principles put into practice.[5]

Jefferson studied the natural world around him as a way of understanding man's place in the universe and defining the unique identity of America. Stow Persons, in his work on the history of American philosophy, describes the logical order of Jeffersonian Enlightenment thinking this way: "Man could fully understand himself only so far as he could comprehend the larger universe of

which he was a part. This universe was a great machine or work of art, which it was man's function to master and use for his own purposes. It was according to God's plan that men should achieve happiness through the exploitation of their environment."[6] Jefferson had a remarkable range of interests, including a curiosity about native tribes and their place in the world. He saw language as the key to understanding the origin of Native Americans and helping to unlock the mystery of how they arrived on the North American continent. In his *Notes on the State of Virginia*, published in 1781, he said that a comparative study of the vocabularies used by different language groups "is the best proof of the affinity of nations which ever can be referred to."[7] In a letter to his friend Edward Rutledge in 1788 he speculated on the "descent of the Creek Indians from the Carthaginians," and contended that a comparison of the contemporary languages of each group would decide the question.[8] A year later he told fellow Virginian James Madison that his goal was "to collect all the vocabularies I can of the American Indians, as of those of Asia, persuaded that if they ever had a common parentage it will appear in their language."[9]

Jefferson's linguistic studies brought him to a variety of conclusions. Based on the large number of Native American languages, he first decided that American Indian culture predated Asian populations and that therefore the Asians migrated westward from North America. He acknowledged that an eastward migration of ancient tribal groups also occurred from Asia to North America across the Bering

Strait but insisted that, on the basis of linguistic evidence, humans had lived in North America longer than they had in Asia. His proof for that conclusion was that "probably twenty" native languages existed in America for every one in Asia. All languages were derived from a single original tongue, he said, and the separation of that language into dialects and then into languages with no resemblance to one another, must have taken an immense amount of time. "A greater number of those radical changes having taken place among the red men of America proves them of greater antiquity than those of Asia," he wrote. Because of their similar physical features, he assumed that all Eskimos were descended from Greenlanders, and he said that a thorough study of their languages would be proof of their common derivation.[10]

Jefferson wrote about his sorrow in seeing so many Indian tribes disappear before their languages could be written down, and he regretted the loss of so much valuable scientific evidence.

> Were vocabularies formed of all the languages spoken in North and South America, preserving their appellations of the most common objects in nature, of those which must be present to every nation barbarous or civilized ... it would furnish opportunities to those skilled in the languages of the old world to compare them with these, now, or

at any future time, and hence construct the best evidence of the derivation of this part of the human race.[11]

To Jefferson and others of his time, the job of building a national character through a common language, literature, and society was as important as establishing a government. They saw the French Revolution of 1789 as a sign that American ideals of liberty and equality were recognized in Europe as well. Europeans, not Americans, were the first to express the modern concept of nationalism and its connection with a common language and literature. Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) wrote in his *Essay on the Origin of Languages,* published posthumously in 1782, that speech is the most significant feature that distinguishes man from animals and that language distinguishes one nation from another. "One does not know where a man comes from until he has spoken," Rousseau said.[12]

Another European thinker who influenced early American development was the German philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803), whose concept of *Volk* was based on the idea that every nation has its own distinct ways of thinking and behaving based on traditions. To him, language was a means through which individuals understood their relationship to their social group and to the world. A nation, in his terms, was a distinct grouping of people who lived within defined borders and shared a common language, history, and folklore.[13] Linguist I.M.

Schlesinger has written about Herder's belief in the connection between a nation's common language and the way in which its citizens think. "Culture is transmitted from father to son through language," Schlesinger wrote in his analysis of Herder. "With the words of his language the infant picks up also the emotional flavor given to them by his parents. Thus language becomes the 'collective treasure of a nation.'"[14] Herder's fellow German Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767-1835) continued the idea, declaring that languages reflected the spiritual character of the nations that nourished them. "Languages are bound to and dependent on the national groups which speak them."[15]

Such rhetoric played well in the new nation struggling to find its own identity and to unify a diverse native and immigrant population. The native tribes that occupied North America provided an opportunity to prove that all of mankind was innately equal. It was only environment and circumstances that rendered some groups uncivilized. Post-revolutionary America was marked by a spirit of reform, with the underlying emphasis on the need for improvement of the Indian way of life. American historian Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. argued that this reformism was a natural outgrowth of the rebellious attitude that European immigrants brought with them to the new nation. They were not burdened, Schlesinger said, by "weight of tradition," and therefore they saw steady "piecemeal progress" as something well within their reach.[16]

Progress for the Indians meant not just agricultural and industrial development, but moral and religious advancement as well. Native people stood in the way of white civilization, and federal policy makers along with Christian missionaries pointed their efforts directly at the core of tribal life. They considered native religion, diet, family life and community customs to be uncivilized. And language, which American society recognized as more than simply a means of communication but a marker of cultural identity as well, became a major part of these reformers' efforts.

Even so, many people within the Christian missionary community disagreed with that philosophy of language. Jesuit Catholics particularly held a view of respect for the native languages they encountered, and throughout their long history of work among Native American tribes they encouraged their use in both religious and secular education. Historian James Moore has written that the early Jesuits found Native American languages to be "both intricate and admirable" and that they considered such qualities to have been proof of the presence of God among the Indians since the beginning of time because "no human wisdom ... could have caused so many people to develop the intricate order around which the native languages centered, an order entirely unlike that of any European language." Moore went on to say that Jesuit missionaries believed that any language that had developed under God's guidance could serve as a language of the church. "Christianity was not bound by either French or Latin," Moore said of Jesuit

missionary beliefs. "Any language, including Indian dialects, through which an appeal could be made to reason, would suffice."[17]

English Puritans, on the other hand, generally adhered to Cotton Mather's opinion that "The best thing we can do for our Indians is to Anglicize them in all agreeable Instances; and in that of Language, as well as others. They can scarce retain their Language, without a Tincture of other Salvage Inclinations."[18] However, other Puritans, notably the missionary John Eliot, published translations of religious material in the Massachuset language as early as 1654. His works included a Catechism, the New Testament, and eventually the complete Bible entitled *Mamusee Wunneetapanatamwe Up-Biblum God*. He also wrote an *Indian Primer*, which was described by one writer as "a means of starting young minds on the road to intellectual as well as spiritual enrichment."[19]

Evidence shows that many Protestant missionaries had long promoted the use of native languages as efficient teaching tools. One example is Congregationalist missionary John Sergeant who, beginning in 1735 in Massachusetts, studied the Algonkian language and translated prayers, sections of the Bible, and a Catechism. His goal, according to one writer, was to educate the Natives and eventually persuade them to adopt English as their first language.[20] Sergeant eventually abandoned his work with the native language and proposed instead to "change their [Indians'] whole habit of thinking and acting and raise them, as far as possible, into the condition of a civil, industrious and polished people ... and withal to introduce

the English language among them instead of their own imperfect and barbarous dialect."[21]

Other Protestant missionaries continued their efforts to learn native languages as well. Beginning in 1745, Presbyterian David Brainerd devoted himself to studying the Delaware language and using it as a tool for education and conversion to Christianity. Even so, Brainerd expressed doubts about the capacity of the native language to express basic Christian principles, and he therefore tried to teach the Indians to speak English, which, he said, "will be more advantageous to the Christian interest among them than if I should preach in their own language, for that is very defective."[22]

Like the missionary societies, federal government policy makers at the end of the eighteenth century were convinced of the need to provide the Native population with the benefits of civilization. However, the nation also needed to establish an atmosphere of peace following the Revolution. The new government could not afford to spend its limited resources in fighting Indian wars, and it felt a responsibility to establish relations with the tribes based on fairness. One of the first acts of Congress dealing with Indian affairs was to put into effect the provisions of the Northwest Ordinance of 1786, which recognized the nation's obligation to justly compensate the Indians for lands lost to white settlers. In 1789, the first Congress passed the first of many appropriations for negotiating with Indian tribes as nations.[23]

Congress established the Indian Department within the Department of War in 1787, and created the office of the superintendent as a means of keeping the secretary of war informed about relations with the tribes. Immediately, the government adopted a plan for bringing the country's Natives into the fold of civilized Americans. Agents of the federal government believed that education, agriculture, and Christianity were the keys to a civilized life, and they saw government as the agent best able to deliver them. At the root of the reform movement was a belief in the steady linear progression of all mankind from barbarism to civilization. In 1789, Secretary of War Henry Knox wrote to George Washington that improvement of the Indians would be a difficult job, but that its success could not be doubted. To suppose that the Indians' "stubborn habits" could not be changed, he told the President, was "entirely contradicted by the progress of society from the barbarous ages to its present degree of perfection."[24]

Treaties between the U.S. government and the Indian nations had, from the beginning, a strong emphasis on the need for civilizing the tribes. A treaty with the Creek Indians in 1790 mentioned the need for the Natives to "become herdsmen and cultivators, instead of remaining in a state of hunters." To Knox, the Indians had no alternative to the process of civilization. In 1792 he told a general who was negotiating with a tribe near Lake Erie that the Indians should understand that civilization was "the only means of perpetuating them on earth." He promised to supply the Indians with teachers and materials so they could learn "to read and

write, to plough, and to sow, in order to raise their own bread and meat, with certainty, as the white people do."[25]

Where civilizing the Natives was mentioned, Christianity was always seen as the most basic element. Government agents and Christian missionaries believed that if the Indians first adopted the teachings of the Bible, then the blessings of white society would soon follow. Christian missionary work among the Indians began early in the colonial period of American history, and soon after independence it became an integral part of the U.S. government's Indian policy. Leading thinkers of the Age of Enlightenment espoused faith in the innate intelligence of all mankind. Indians, they believed, were not savage by nature. They were intellectually equal to whites, and they lived in a primitive state only because of their environment.

To Thomas Jefferson, equality with the white man was no justification for allowing the Indians to continue their tribal ways of life. Quite the opposite, it proved that Native Americans possessed the ability to think and reason and ultimately to adopt the best of white society. Equality, in Jefferson's view, was what made the Indians worthy of government and Christian missionary efforts to improve them; assimilation of the Natives into the more advanced culture was part of nature's order. Jefferson, because of his fascination with understanding this natural order, continued his interest in languages even while serving as U.S. President. However, all his data, including the Native American vocabularies, were

lost in 1809 when thieves destroyed a shipment of his belongings being sent from Washington back to his home in Virginia. His intention remained one of proving that Indians were equal to civilized man, and he was convinced that in time Native Americans would meld into white society and differences in language and culture would disappear. Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. has written that Americans of Jefferson's time were "endowed by birthright with a spontaneous and spacious belief in opportunity and equality as the ends of society and in social, political, and technological invention as the means."[26]

Noah Webster's 'Band of National Union'

No function of government was more vital to the cause of building an American national identity than education. Reformers viewed the classroom as an effective means for the inculcation of American Christian morals and the destruction of tribalism. The idea that language is an essential part of a unified national and patriotic spirit took root in the school system, and where linguistic unity was concerned no one in the new world had more to say than the educator and lexicographer Noah Webster. He argued for standardizations in spelling, grammar, and usage in order to make American English not only easier to learn and use, but also unique and distinct from the language as it was spoken anywhere else.

> A national language is a band of national union [Webster said]. Every engine should be employed to render the people of this country national; to call their attachments home to their own country; and to inspire them with the pride of their national character. However they may boast of independence, and the freedom of their government, yet their opinions are not sufficiently independent; an astonishing respect for the arts and literature of their parent country, and a blind imitation of its manners, are still prevalent among the Americans. Thus an habitual respect for another country, deserved indeed and once laudable, turns their attention from their own interests, and prevents their respecting themselves.[27]

Webster saw the school system as a vehicle for instilling patriotism, and by the summer of 1783 he had produced a basic book on grammar and spelling intended for use in American schools. Known popularly as the "blue-backed speller," Webster's book taught virtue and citizenship as basic elements of the lessons on language. It quickly became one of the most widely used books in America and was reprinted in dozens of editions and used in schools nationwide for well over one hundred years. Webster knew that if America were to coalesce as a nation, it had to have its own unique history, literature, and language. The school system and his "blue-backed speller" with its uniformity of language and its explicit moral lessons were the means for reaching that end. Henry Steele Commager, in his introduction

to a modern reprint of Webster's "blue-backed speller," wrote that "The United States, dedicated to the unprecedented experiment of republicanism in a vast territory, a heterogeneous population, and a classless society, could not afford differences of accent or of language."[28] From the beginning of his career, Webster intended to use the schools as "engines of nationalism."[29]

Webster put his efforts into standardizing the American language and its rules of spelling, grammar, pronunciation, and usage. In 1789 he published his *Dissertations on the English Language*, in which he continued to assert that nationwide uniformity of education and textbooks was needed in order to "preserve the purity of the American tongue" and that political harmony in the United States depended on a uniformity of language.[30] Specifically he recommended that spelling be reformed so that, for example, *bread* would become *bred*, *give* would become *giv*, *mean* would become *meen*, *grief* would become *greef*, *daughter* would become *dawter*, *chorus* would become *korus*. Besides the benefits to the spirit of nationalism, such changes, Webster said, would save printing costs by cutting the number of letters used; it would allow children to learn more easily; and it would promote equality, mutual affection and respect because Americans of all social and economic classes would speak and write uniformly.[31] He was clearly impressed with the powers of language to effect social as well as political change.

The work for which Webster is best known is, of course, *An American Dictionary of the English Language*, published in 1828 after twenty-five years of

labor. In that volume as in previous writings, Webster made no attempt to conceal the social and political motivation behind his work. Still, he had softened his opinions considerably over the years, and in the preface he acknowledged that "the body of the language is the same as in England and it is desirable to perpetuate that sameness."[32] But his assumption that the language as used in America was an expression of that nation's unique identity remained as strong as ever. He continued to stress the need for regularity in both vocabulary and grammar, and thus establish "a standard of our vernacular tongue which we shall not be ashamed to bequeath to three hundred millions of people who are destined to occupy and, I hope, to adorn the vast territory within our jurisdiction."[33]

Thus the young country took steps to unify itself not only politically but also socially and culturally, and Native Americans were swept up in the current of nationalism. Enlightenment thinkers were consumed with the idea of equality, but they also viewed North America as an open continent and the United States as a privileged nation destined for great things. Nothing, including natural obstacles and occupation of the promised land by aboriginal tribes, would stand in the way of that destiny. "The sun never shined on a cause of greater worth," the revolutionary pamphleteer Thomas Paine wrote in *Common Sense*. "Now is the seed-time of continental union, faith and honour."[34] Similarly, the patriot John Jay of New York wrote in *The Federalist Papers* that "Providence has been pleased to give this one connected country to one united people, a people descended from the same

ancestors, speaking the same language, professing the same religion, attached to the same principles of government, very similar in manners and customs."[35]

The founders of the new United States considered the idea of language as a "band of national union" to be a noble Enlightenment concept and a good thing for America. However, the concept of nationalism did not apply to Indian tribes. As historian Oscar Handlin noted in his study of nationalism in America, citizens of the new nation never, in practice, acknowledged the sovereignty of the native tribes, and formal treaties and conferences with the Indians were nothing more than an "elaborate pretense."[36] Tribal nationalism, along with cultural and linguistic pluralism, was a detriment to continental union as the founders envisioned it. Handlin went on to say that the certainty of American progress convinced people that over time the problem of resistant Indian tribes would solve itself as the Natives either moved to new territories or accepted their place in white society. This hope for the future, Handlin argued, "permitted Americans to push to the backs of their minds the contradiction between their fundamental conceptions of nationality and the existence of the Negro and Indian enclaves."[37] In summary, as historian Christine Bolt has demonstrated, white Americans following the colonial period acknowledged tribal sovereignty when it suited them but "disavow[ed]" it when it did not.[38] Sovereignty was convenient for negotiating treaties and engaging in trade, but at the same time it was detrimental to national unity.

Native Americans were in the way, and the building of the American union meant that the nationalism inherent in tribes was subordinate to the destiny of the new nation as a whole. American settlers told the Indians that they were to become civilized and that the language of civilization was English.

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Chapter 4

Language Policy in Nineteenth Century America

Americans in the first half of the nineteenth century were, according to historian Oscar Handlin, "ebullient citizens who believed and argued that their language, their literature, their art, and their polity were distinctive and original."[1] The pervasive spirit of national group identity required that all Americans help to make the language uniform by, in Noah Webster's words, "demolishing those odious distinctions of provincial dialects which are the subject of reciprocal ridicule."[2] Part of the challenge and the spirit of optimism that pervaded the new land was the idea that a nation of diverse immigrant groups could be formed into a cultural and political unity on a new untouched continent all its own. Even Ralph Waldo Emerson, the champion of the individual over the interests of society, observed that America had a special destiny that was "giving an aspect of greatness to the Future, which the imagination fears to open."[3] This future greatness required a spirit of national unity and the use of a common language for immigrant as well as aboriginal Americans. John Quincy Adams wrote to his father in 1811, "The whole continent of North America appears to be destined by Divine Providence to be peopled by one nation, speaking one language, professing one general system of

religious and political principles, and accustomed to one general tenor of social usages and customs."[4] That connection between national unity and a common language continued throughout the nineteenth century. "Nothing so surely and perfectly stamps upon an individual a national characteristic as language," Commissioner of Indian Affairs J.D.C. Atkins wrote in 1887. "Every nation is jealous of its own language, and no nation ought to be more so than ours, which approaches nearer that any other nationality to the perfect protection of its people."[5] The federal government was determined to extend to the Native Americans who lived within its states, territories and possessions the "perfect protection" of the English language.

United States Indian policy throughout the 1800s, however, was overshadowed by one central dilemma. How could the new nation ensure fair, just, and humane treatment of the continent's native inhabitants while also allowing Euro-American settlers the access they demanded to land and resources? It was a conflict that engaged the brightest minds of the time, and it produced federal policy that encompassed the full range from humanitarian understanding to brutal warfare.

The century began soon after the administration of President George Washington recognized the government's obligation to treat Native American tribes with rights similar to those due foreign nations. It ended amid a furious nationalistic movement that demanded assimilation of all Americans into a single

culture defined by Protestant European standards. The years between were marked by arguments over the best course of action to take in Indian affairs. On one side were the frontiersmen and settlers who saw Indians as nothing more than hostile forces to be destroyed in the interest of progress. On the other side, government policy makers, often military men bent on reform but tired of war, urged the government to adopt a policy aimed at shaping the Indians into a civilized, Christian, agrarian mold. "He must ... be civilized," wrote General William Tecumseh Sherman in 1871, "or he will be exterminated from the face of the earth by an inevitable and irresistible influence. The former course is just, possible and expedient; the latter cannot be entertained by a Christian nation."[6]

No matter what the prevailing Indian policy at any particular time during the nineteenth century — from removal under President Andrew Jackson to peace under President U.S. Grant — the underlying emphasis was on the need for improvement of the Indian way of life so that tribal people could be given the tools they needed to survive and prosper in modern America. Through all the changes of direction in overall Indian policy, the attitude toward language and other characteristics that identified Native Americans as distinct cultural groups remained the same. The traits that set Natives apart from white society were despised and feared. As Commissioner of Indian Affairs Luke Lea wrote in 1851, federal efforts were directed at "dissolving the ice of heathenism and the veil of superstition that have darkened their savage though stately minds."[7]

Federal Funds for Indian Education

The schools were seen as the best vehicle for the inculcation of Christian morals, for the destruction of tribalism, and for the preparation of Native Americans for life as farmers or, in the last two decades of the century, as workers in America's growing industrial economy. Missionary teachers had been working among the Indians for generations, and in the first years after independence the U.S. government welcomed and encouraged their efforts. The first formal Congressional commitment to Indian education came in 1819 with an act intended "for the purpose of providing against the further decline and final extinction of the Indian tribes ... and for introducing among them the habits and arts of civilization." The law provided an annual fund of $10,000 to employ people to teach the three R's as well as the techniques of farming.[8]

President James Monroe and Secretary of War John Calhoun determined that the money could best be spent by distributing it among the missionary societies already at work in many areas of the country. The Department of War set up a system by which any Christian group with an interest in providing education to the Indians could apply for funding.[9] It was the beginning of a system of contractual relationships between the federal government and Christian missionary teachers that would last until the end of the century. The arrangement was mutually beneficial. Both parties worked toward the common goal of erasing the habits of

hunting and gathering and substituting instead the value of hard work in the fields, individual ownership of property, and acceptance of Jesus Christ as savior.

One of the leading advocates of the government-supported mission schools was Thomas L. McKenney, a tireless reformer who by 1816 had risen to the position of head of the federal Office of Indian Trade. For years before the passage of the 1819 Indian education law, McKenney had argued for the need to civilize the native tribes. He consistently advocated farming as the best means of reform. "This is the way you will most effectually promote the great object of the govt. towards these unenlightened people," he wrote. "Invite their attention to agriculture and the arts. Our object is not to keep these Indians hunters eternally. We want to make citizens of them, and they must first be anchored in the soil."[10]

In lobbying Congress in favor of the Indian education bill, McKenney left no doubt about his belief that Indian children needed a solid Christian education, and to him moral and intellectual advancement had to include the dominance of English as the language of everyday communication. "I have long believed the key to the civilization of our Aborigines to be the knowledge of some Christian language — but especially the English," he wrote. "It is this which, after all, is to effect the change in the character and destiny of these people. It is the lever by which they are to elevate themselves into intellectual and moral distinction."[11]

With the passage of the Indian school bill in 1819, McKenney joined other government officials in directing federal funds to missionary schools. He wrote

that the money should support the "benevolent channels that have been opened," and that it should be spent "where letters, the Christian religion, and agriculture are taught."[12]

With federal money, the activities of Christian missionary educators increased rapidly among the Indians. Secretary of War John Calhoun reported in 1820 that four missionary schools were operating, with four more in the planning stage. By 1834 there were sixty such schools attended by more than two thousand Indian children.[13]

Cherokee Literacy

Several different religious groups administered the schooling of Native Americans. Moravians, Baptists, Quakers, Methodists, and an alliance of Presbyterians and Congregationalists known as the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions all received government money to run schools in Indian country. Some of the religious organizations simply continued the ministry they had been conducting among the tribes for years. The Moravians, for example, supplemented their funding of the mission to the Cherokees with the newly appropriated federal money. The Moravians had made practically no progress in learning the Cherokee language since beginning their mission in 1799. Only one of their members, John McDonald, had become conversant in Cherokee, and even he contended that it was impossible to translate Christian doctrine into

that language.[14] One Moravian told Thomas McKenney that the Cherokee language "cannot be attained by Adults and when attained is incapable of conveying any Idea beyond the sphere of the senses; there seems to be no other way left by which the Spiritual or Temporal Good of these People can be promoted than by teaching them in our Language."[15] Later the same missionary wrote that "My object, and I trust the object of all other missionaries, has been to rescue the Aboriginal Man himself from the Destruction which awaits his Race, rather than [to rescue] his History, Language, Customs, etc."[16]

However, after a Cherokee man working alone developed a system for writing his language in 1821, other missionaries marveled at the resulting advance in literacy among Cherokee-speaking people. Invented by Sequoyah, the system divided the Cherokee language into eighty-six syllables and assigned a symbol to each. The symbols could then be combined to make words, allowing native speakers of any age to read or write with very little practice. Historians today attribute the Cherokees' rapid advance toward agriculture, Christianity, education and republican government in large part to Sequoyah's syllabic writing system.[17] In 1827 one white missionary, the Congregationalist Samuel Austin Worcester, wrote that the Cherokee people believed in the superiority of the Sequoyah syllabary and that books written in that method would be read, while "if in any other, they will lie useless." The newspaper *Cherokee Phoenix* began publication in

1828, and later Worcester worked with literate Cherokees on translations of the Bible and Christian hymns using the Sequoyah syllabary.[18]

Still, the Cherokee Nation did not formally adopt Sequoyan, and instead English became its official language as the tribal leadership remained committed to a policy of rapid acculturation. At the same time, however, missionaries such as Worcester encouraged the use of Cherokee writing as the most effective way to spread Christianity. Historian William McLoughlin suggests that these two language forces moving in opposite directions both contributed to cultural change among the Cherokees. Sequoyah's invention served as a source of nationalistic pride and a means of self-expression which, along with the concurrent adoption of Christianity by many Cherokees, "seemed to provide a means of asserting greater control over themselves and their future."[19] While some religious groups worked to translate materials into Sequoyan, others continued to see the language as an impediment to acculturation. One Moravian wrote that "It is indispensably necessary for their preservation that they should learn our Language and adopt our laws and Holy Religion. ... The study of their language would in great measure prove but time and labor lost. ... it seems desirable that their Language, Customs, Manner of Thinking, etc. should be forgotten."[20]

Since traditionalist Cherokee groups also used Sequoyan in their efforts to resist the forces of acculturation, the Cherokee writing system "thus provided a powerful impetus after 1821 to the growing division between the acculturated and

the unacculturated, the rich and the poor, the Christians and the traditionalists."[21] Presbyterian Daniel Butrick, who had worked as a missionary among the Cherokees since 1818, declared that the language was exceptional in its "richness and beauty," and that religious material could be translated into it with little difficulty. After translating the New Testament, he wrote that Christian ideas "of every kind and degree may be communicated to this people in their own language with as much clearness and accuracy as in ours."[22]

Although actual numbers are indefinite, historians estimate that a majority of Cherokee adults became literate in their own language within one year of Sequoyah's invention. Beginning in 1830, the federal government and the U.S. Army removed the Cherokees to Oklahoma from their homeland in southern Appalachia, and in 1835 the Georgia government destroyed the Cherokee printing press. The press was re-established in Oklahoma, where the tribe continued to print government documents, religious and educational material, newspapers and books, contributing to a proliferation of Cherokee literacy in the nineteenth century.[23]

Federal Policy Evolves

Meanwhile, increasing demands in the administration of Indian affairs brought on a significant bureaucratic change. In 1824, Calhoun officially created the Office of Indian Affairs within the Department of War and named Thomas McKenney as superintendent. In his new position, McKenney continued his

support for government funding of the mission schools. In his annual report for 1826, McKenney saw education as a more powerful force than the military in civilizing the Indians. He praised, "the vast benefits which the Indian children are deriving from these establishments, and which go further, in my opinion, towards securing our borders from bloodshed, and keeping the peace among the Indians themselves, and attaching them to us, than would physical force of our Army."[24]

Regarding Indian students and the use of their native languages in the schools, he said, "I care not how soon they forget altogether their own language, altho' this is not necessary — they may retain both. But I believe the less of it that is taught, or spoken, the better for the Indians. Their whole character, inside and out; language and morals must be changed."[25]

During McKenney's administration in the 1820s, Indian policy was based on the need to control white encroachment on the lands that Indians had been awarded by treaty. But the movement of settlers into rich farmlands and the activities of fur trappers were increasingly hard to stop. The federal government found itself powerless to enforce the protections it had guaranteed to the various tribes. Furthermore, it became clear to policy makers such as McKenney, Calhoun, and President James Monroe that efforts to civilize the Indians would fail as long as the Indians lived near white settlers and the degrading influences of gambling, thievery, and whiskey.

In 1824 Monroe suggested a plan for removing all Indians to areas west of the Mississippi. There, McKenney agreed, the Indians could be situated in colonies and the government could continue its philanthropic efforts at civilization. Thus, guided by humanitarian convictions, began the policy that led to the forced separation of entire cultures from their ancestral homelands. In 1830 President Andrew Jackson signed the removal bill into law.

McKenney was replaced under the administration of Democrat Andrew Jackson, who was elected in 1828, but the plan for removal of the tribes across the Mississippi became, if anything, even more determined. McKenney's successor, Elbert Herring, wrote in his annual report for 1831 that the eastern tribes were disappearing rapidly with the advance of white society, and that extinction would follow unless some "principle" were employed to stop it. "This salutary principle," he concluded, "exists in the system of removal; of change of residence; of settlement in territories exclusively their own, and under the protection of the United States." Herring also subscribed to McKenney's faith in the need for education as a civilizing influence under which "social is distinguished from savage life." He saw the schools as a system "calculated to subdue the habits and soften the feelings of their kindred, and to prepare the way for the gradual introduction of civilization and Christianity ... It is an experiment consecrated by our best feelings, delightful to the view of the patriot, and dear to the heart of philanthropy."[26]

President Jackson's reorganized the Indian Office and in 1832 established a new agency called the Bureau of Indian Affairs with its own commissioner under the secretary of war. Jackson's presidency marked a sharp change in the government's removal policy. Presidents Monroe and John Quincy Adams before him advocated only voluntary removal, and bureaucrats under them had ensured the Indians that no tribes would be physically forced to leave their homelands. However, as researcher Felix Cohen notes in his *Handbook of Federal Indian Law*, the Jackson administration was willing to use any means necessary to accomplish the move to the West.[27]

Willingness to use military force showed up in annual reports by Jackson's Commissioner of Indian Affairs Elbert Herring who wrote in 1835 that the Seminole Indians had resisted orders to move, and that "their removal could not be effected without compulsion." The Army sent a unit to the area, and the commissioner added that the Seminoles had subsequently "seen their interest and obligation in a clear light, and that they are busily engaged in preparations to remove during the ensuing spring."

In the same report, Herring reiterated his belief in education as "the principal step in the ladder that leads from the aboriginal to the civilized state." To the usual calls for lessons in agriculture, however, he added "mechanic arts" as skills that could be "readily grafted on the Indian stock."[28] The goal was to provide any

means possible for the Indian to turn away from tribal customs and earn a living as white people did.

During this period, even amid efforts to force Indians to give up tribal traditions and customs, the government continued to fund research on native language and culture, and the public maintained a fascination with aboriginal life. The Department of War assisted ethnographer Albert Gallatin in his study of Native American tribes and the classification of their languages. His work *A Synopsis of the Indian Tribes of North America* was published in 1846 after ten years of research and quickly became a major source of knowledge for both the government and the general public. Like his nineteenth-century contemporaries, Gallatin was optimistic about his country's future progress and convinced of its great destiny to move and expand. "The Western people leap over time and distance," he wrote. "Ahead they must go; it is their mission."[29]

The Seminoles, Creeks, and Cherokees fought as long as they could against removal from their homelands, but by 1838 all had to accept a forced emigration to the West. The migration route these tribes followed westward that year has become known as the "Trail of Tears." A majority of white America had come to believe that the only salvation for the Indians was separation accompanied by a system of education that would allow them eventually to join the dominant culture. Jackson himself, however, saw the issue in purely racial terms, and he appeared to have given up on any hope for the process of civilization. "They have neither the

intelligence, the industry, the moral habits, nor the desire of improvement which are essential to any favorable change in their condition," he told Congress. "Established in the midst of another and superior race and without appreciating the causes of their inferiority or seeking to control them, they must necessarily yield to the force of circumstances and ere long disappear."[30]

Commissioner of Indian Affairs T. Hartley Crawford saw removal as a purely humanitarian and benevolent gesture by the federal government. Since Indians clearly could not live surrounded by a white population, the government was acting in the tribes' best interests by arranging for their separation and removal and providing a system of education. Like Jackson, Crawford focused on the need to create a distant homeland for the Natives and teach them the white man's ways, but not allow the two societies to mix. It was much different than Jefferson's view, which envisioned the gradual inclusion of Native Americans into mainstream society as they learned the advantages of modern civilization. To Jackson and his agents, civilization for the Indians was not synonymous with their integration into American society. "What can even the moral and educated Indian promise himself in a white settlement?" Crawford asked.[31]

Even though Crawford believed in separation, he was optimistic that government-sponsored schools would raise the Indians out of their degraded state. But in his view, education and civilization could not occur simultaneously. Learning offered no advantage to the Natives until they first adopted a civilized

way of life. "To teach a savage man to read, while he continues a savage in all else, is to throw seed on a rock," he said. Crawford advocated a system of manual-labor schools. He praised the work of the missionary societies in Indian education and urged the government to continue its support "of those who choose to labor in this work of benevolence."[32]

Varying Missionary Views of Language

In their annual written reports, teachers working in the Christian missionary schools generally reflected the opinions of their supervisors in Washington, D.C. In 1849, two teachers at a Sioux mission station in Minnesota reported some opposition to education and predicted doom for those who refused to learn. "How long will these simple ones love simplicity, these fools hate knowledge," they wondered. "They think they can subsist a little longer much as their fathers subsisted, and wish to make no unnecessary changes; but they admit that their destiny is to change or perish."[33]

On the question of the use of the native languages in the schools, however, missionary teachers were divided in their opinions. Some believed that all subjects, including religion, could be taught most efficiently in the students' first language. Others advocated total immersion in English as a part of the overall effort to raise the Indians to a standard of civilization acceptable to white America. The argument for teaching in the native language was expressed in a report by teachers Samuel

W. Pond and Gideon H. Pond to the commissioner of Indian affairs in 1849. The two brothers wrote that they had been working as missionaries among the Sioux Indians of Minnesota for fifteen years. At first they had no connection to any missionary society, and they had directed their efforts at learning the native language and teaching the lessons of the Bible in words the people could readily understand. A year later the men taught in missionary schools operated by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) and continued their work of translating teaching materials into the native language. They had immediate success, they said, in teaching Indian children to read and write in their own language.

The Ponds reported that in contrast to their success, a nearby school where Methodist Episcopal missionaries insisted on teaching entirely in English had shown poor results. Those students learned too little of the language to do any good, and soon after they left school they forgot all they did know.

In the Ponds' opinion, the primary obstacle to learning was the lack of materials printed in the native language. They said that in 1839 the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions had printed spelling and reading books and translations of parts of the Bible in the Dakota language, and as a result literacy and knowledge of Christianity had increased rapidly.[34] In his autobiography, Samuel Pond wrote that his own ability to teach effectively in Indian schools depended on the "correctness and facility" with which he spoke the

Dakota language. He pointed out that people who have only a superficial knowledge of Indian languages often considered those languages to be "imperfect and defective, and can be made to express a very limited range of ideas." In regard to Dakota, Pond said, that opinion was definitely untrue.[35]

Two other ABCFM Protestant missionaries who contributed to Dakota language learning beginning in the 1830s were Stephen R. Riggs and Thomas S. Williamson. Both men spoke the language and translated religious and secular materials for use in the schools for Indian children. Riggs produced a grammar and a dictionary, and he worked with Williamson on a translation of the Bible. Their language work indicates a strong belief among some missionaries that they could teach Christian principles and effect the religious conversion of the Indians by using the aboriginal languages.[36] In his 1880 memoir, *Mary and I: Forty Years with the Sioux*, Riggs explained that it was clear to him from the beginning of his missionary service that use of the native language was essential to his success. "Not to preach Christ to them only," he said, "but to engraft his living words into their living thoughts ... was the object of our coming. ... To put God's thoughts into their speech, and to teach them to read in their own tongue the wonderful works of God, was what brought us to the land of the Dakotas."[37]

Riggs said that teaching English to Dakota children was always exceedingly difficult and often showed very little success. However, "Teaching in Dakota was a different thing" as he found that students advanced rapidly when they were offered

lessons in the language they could readily understand. "For the purposes of civilization, and especially of Christianization, we have found culture in the native tongue indispensable."[38] He found that long hours working on translations of the Bible with interpreters was the best means of studying the structure of the Dakota language. Although Riggs considered his grammar and dictionary to have been incidental to his missionary assignment, he felt that his effort in compiling those linguistic works "brought its reward in the better insight it gave one of their [the Indians'] forms of thought and expression." The American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions consistently supported Riggs, Williamson and the Pond brothers in their language research. Riggs wrote that in 1851, when he had his dictionary and grammar manuscripts ready for publication, the ABCFM "cheerfully consented to pay my expenses while carrying the work through the press, besides making a donation to it directly from their Treasury."[39]

Catholic missionaries also established themselves in the western plains in the 1840s and began work in the native languages. The Jesuit Augustin Ravoux arrived in Minnesota in 1841 and translated a catechism and hymnal into the Santee Sioux language.[40]

Other missionary teachers, however, held different opinions about the value of native languages. David Eakins, for example, told the commissioner of Indian Affairs in 1849 that one of the barriers to success in Indian education was indeed the native language. Eakins, who taught in a school for Creek Indians, charged that

the large schools prevented acquisition of English because so many Indian children in one place presented a "temptation" to use their native language both inside and outside the classroom. Not only that, Eakins said, but the large number of Native Americans in one place had a further bad effect on children of mixed blood; several cases were known in which "half-breeds" who knew nothing of the native language came to the Indian school and there acquired it "by being thrown in these large places where it was in constant use."[41]

Differences of opinion about the use of native languages in the schools point out more than just divergent teaching styles in the 1840s. Samuel and Gideon Pond, for example, accepted that the goal of education was knowledge, and if the Dakota language was the best means available to achieve that goal, they were quite willing to use it. To David Eakins, on the other hand, the Creek language was a characteristic of a backward culture which Indians had to give up in order to meet the demands of modern civilization. While teachers on both sides of the argument believed in the mission of bringing literacy, Christianity, and manual-labor skills to the Indians, some recognized that it was easier to use the native language to their advantage than to attempt to fight it.

Increased Urgency

Meanwhile, the change from military to civilian control of Indian affairs occurred in 1849, when the federal government transferred the Bureau of Indian

Affairs from the Department of War to the newly formed Department of the Interior. But the administrative shift did not alter the government's commitment to a system of Indian schools focused on teaching manual-labor skills and Christian morality. By the middle of the century, increasing white encroachment on Indian lands west of the Mississippi had amplified a sense of urgency within the Washington bureaucracy. The only plan for saving the Indians from extinction seemed to be their full conversion to an agricultural way of life. The wild resources — most notably buffalo — on which the Indians depended had already shown a sharp decline in numbers, and white settlers were rapidly moving in on rich agricultural and mining lands occupied by various tribes. The California gold rush brought an unending stream of people both by sea and overland from the East, and suddenly the tribes felt pressure from the west as well as the east.

"The only alternatives left are to civilize or exterminate them," wrote Secretary of the Interior Alexander Stuart in 1851. "We must adopt one or the other." He based that conclusion on what he saw as an unstoppable flow of population and the resulting pressure on Indian lands from both sides of the continent. The secretary could see nothing but continued bloody confrontation with the Indians unless the government adopted some immediate and drastic policy changes. Most conflicts occurred, he wrote, when white settlers forced Indians off productive lands and into "sterile regions which produce neither corn nor game for their subsistence." When the Indians attack out of dire necessity to steal food

goods, retaliation follows retaliation and war ensues. Stuart saw this as the "true history of the origin of most of our Indian wars."[42]

His solution for the short term was to furnish the Indians with food and clothing to satisfy their immediate needs. More significantly, however, he called for an end to the policy of removal, and he wanted a guarantee that Indian tribes would be allowed to retain large parts of their territory for their "exclusive use and occupation." The government would supply them with tools and domestic animals and encourage them to become farmers. His solution was to persuade the Indians to "engage in agricultural and pastoral pursuits, and to rely on the products of their labor, instead of the spoils of the chase."[43]

Stuart's 1851 report foreshadowed two plans that would become central parts of late nineteenth century federal policy: the reservation system and allotment of individual plots of land to replace traditional communal ownership. "The great obstacle to success is their nomadic mode of life," he wrote, adding that

> to tame a savage, you must tie him down to the soil. You must make him understand the value of property and the benefits of its separate ownership. You must appeal to those selfish principles implanted by Divine Providence in the nature of man, for the wisest purposes, and make them minister to civilization and refinement. You must encourage the appropriation of lands by individuals.[44]

Teachers in the early 1850s supported the manual-labor boarding schools over the so-called day-schools because the boarding school environment gave them full-time control over all aspects of the students' lives. A report from J. Ross Ramsey, superintendent of the Kowetah mission school for the Creek Indians, is an example of the strict discipline that teachers and administrators enforced in the manual-labor boarding schools. It also reveals the intensity that the government-sponsored missionaries brought to the job of enlightening the children of what he called "this dark wilderness."

Ramsey's report was an argument in favor of the kind of school he ran at Kowetah over those schools which allowed the children to return to their homes every afternoon. To him the issue was as clear as the choice between civilization and barbarism.

> Place an Indian boy in a manual-labor school, and he is thus perfectly under the eye and control of his teacher ... He is going on in useful acquisitions; and as from time to time he witnesses the peace and happiness which reign in his mission home, and compares it with the wretchedness he has seen in his old heathen home, he soon begins to lose his desire for the latter and clings to the former.

In Ramsey's view, the purpose of the schools was to "teach the Indian youth the sublime truths of the Bible, store his mind with a correct knowledge of the nations of the earth, and accustom his head and hands to correct ideas about good farming." The job required strict rules, and every good teacher was sometimes "obliged to use the rod" to enforce them.[45]

One of those rules at the Kowetah school was a prohibition of the Creek language. To the charge that the comparatively large number of Indian students at the manual-labor schools made it hard to control an English-only language policy, Ramsey responded in clear and certain terms. "It is not true that Indian children of manual-labor schools are allowed the free use of their own language ... Strict rules are enforced at the manual-labor schools requiring the children to speak English alone when in the presence of the missionaries and inflicting punishment on those who speak Creek."

He added that he believed that the day-schools enforced no such restrictions and that it was unlikely that the day-schools students would learn English as fast as those who were "constantly with the teachers in the mission families, where they hear nothing but English."[46]

A teacher at another Creek school expressed the same opinion. At the manual-labor boarding schools, R.M. Loughridge wrote, the teachers could "govern as well as instruct." The job of the educators was to improve manners and morals and to destroy superstitions. This could not be done, Loughridge believed,

"where the child returns home at night to unlearn with its ignorant and superstitious parents what it learned at school through the day."[47]

To Loughridge as well, the boarding school provided a far better environment than the day-school for teaching the English language. Unless students acquired the use of English, Loughridge said, little progress could be made in any area of education. And language instruction should occur not only in the classroom but in the missionary home as well.

Even though no written regulations in the 1850s required an English-only curriculum or expressly called for the suppression of native languages, missionary teachers regularly expressed an understanding of the need to teach English as a necessary skill in modern America. A teacher at the Kaposia mission in Minnesota, for example, wrote that even though Indian children could be taught to read in English, none had succeeded in understanding or speaking it until they moved into English-speaking homes. The teacher recommended placing more Indian students with such families. "In this way alone are they likely to acquire any useful knowledge of our language, which our government regards so important that they should learn."[48]

Reservations

By 1855 the failure of the removal policy, which had seen such hopeful beginnings thirty years earlier, was obvious to people at the highest level of the

Department of the Interior. The government had not lost sight of its goals of educating and civilizing the Indians and transforming them into a self-sufficient agrarian society, but circumstances forced a change in the means to those ends. The Bureau of Indian Affairs admitted that, overall, the country's Indian population was little closer to a state of civilization than it ever had been. Commissioner of Indian Affairs George Manypenny noted that federal policies of removing tribes to unsettled land in the West had to that point succeeded only in producing distrust of government among the Indians.

New plans recognized two errors in the removal policy. One was in separating the tribes from their homelands; the other was in placing the Indians in remote areas far from regular contact with white society and economy. Under such circumstances, Manypenny asked, "how could he be expected to abandon his savage customs and habits and take up with the pursuits of a race whose approach was only a notice to him that he must leave the graves of his family and friends and surrender his home to the pale faces?"[49]

The commissioner recommended a system of reservations, which would provide a "fixed, settled, and permanent home" where the Indians would be safe from further encroachment by white settlers. Manypenny saw reservations as a guarantee that America's westward migration would continue while at the same time the Indians would have "peaceable possession and undisturbed enjoyment of their land." He predicted that "the settler and the Indian will soon experience the

good effects that will result to both. The former will then regard the latter as his neighbor and friend, and will treat him with the consideration due to this relation."[50]

The reservation system coupled with continued support for education was Manypenny's plan for preventing the extinction of the Indians. He believed that once the tribes were settled on secure permanent reservations, their elevation to a civilized state would surely follow.

The government continued to deal with tribes with rights and legal procedures similar to those used with foreign nations, and it negotiated Indian treaties on a government-to-government basis, acknowledging the independent and national traits inherent in the tribes. The landmark decision written in 1831 by U.S. Supreme Court Chief Justice John Marshall recognized this unique and special relationship with the federal government, defining Native American tribes not as sovereign states but as "domestic dependent nations." Marshall's opinion acknowledged the internal self-governing powers of the tribes, but also defined their relationship to the United States as resembling that of a ward to his guardian.[51]

Treaty-making with the tribes continued throughout the 1850s, but the Civil War years saw a growing movement within government to end the practice while continuing a strictly paternalistic position. "Instead of being treated as independent nations," Secretary of the Interior Caleb Smith said in 1862, "they should be

regarded as wards of the government, entitled to its fostering care and protection." Smith based this new policy on his assumption that Indian land claims should never hinder westward expansion of the American population. "The rapid progress of civilization upon this continent will not permit the lands which are required for cultivation to be surrendered to savage tribes for hunting grounds."[52]

By the end of the 1860s, at the urging of men such as Commissioner of Indian Affairs Ely S. Parker, the federal government had ended its policy of treaty-making with the tribes. In his annual report for 1869, Parker argued forcefully for a stop to the practice on grounds that it unfairly deluded the Indians into believing that they had national independence. "It is time that this idea should be dispelled, and the government cease the cruel farce of thus dealing with its helpless and ignorant wards," Parker wrote. He added that the tribes had no sovereign powers, organized government, or ability to comply with their own treaty obligations.[53]

Grant and the Peace Policy

The decade of the 1860s was a time of growing enmity between the races. Soon after a series of battles had killed more than seven hundred white citizens and soldiers in Minnesota, a Sioux Indian agent wrote that settlers there were calling for any measure that would end the Indian problem. "Extermination, massacre, banishment, torture, huddling together, killing with small-pox, poison, and kindness, have all been proposed," he said.[54] Just before he was elected president

in 1868, General Ulysses S. Grant told a reporter for *The New York Times* that settlers in the West had to be protected even if that protection required the extermination of every tribe.[55]

In January of that same year, the Congressionally appointed Peace Commission had issued a report outlining its plans for avoiding the extermination Grant described. Pressure for such action came mainly from an influential organization of Quakers and other Christian reformers who had pressed the government for a commitment to peace and the protection of Indian lands from white land-grabbers and whiskey-peddlers. Their voices were heard in a Congress growing impatient with the high costs of military campaigns against the Indians. In response Congress established the Peace Commission charged with finding a way to end hostilities and a plan for civilizing the Indians.[56]

In January, 1868, the Peace Commission reported on its policy of "endeavoring to conquer by kindness." While the report placed most of the blame for hostilities squarely on the shoulders of white settlers for their encroachment on Indian lands, it also concluded that the Natives were doomed no matter which way they reacted. If they submitted to the white invasion of their homelands, they would be branded as cowards and slaves; if they fought back, they would face the full force of the U.S. Army. "The treaty was broken, but not by the Indians," the Peace Commission concluded. "These Indians saw their former homes and hunting grounds overrun by a greedy population thirsting for gold. They saw their game

driven east to the plains, and soon found themselves the objects of jealousy and hatred."[57]

Even with that acknowledgment, however, the Peace Commission also expressed its wish to see the entire continent settled and its mineral and agricultural resources developed by "an industrious, thrifty, and enlightened population." But it recognized that lands secured by treaty had been stolen from the Indian, and it wanted to avoid those errors of the past. It wanted to reverse the thinking of white people who for generations in America had said, in effect, "every inch of the land belongs to the saints, and we are the saints."[58]

The commission, therefore, enumerated a list of recommendations based on uniformity and assimilation. It considered the English language to be one of the keys to eliminating the social and cultural differences that were the root cause of all wars. Teaching the children to speak English would remove the barriers to proper understanding between the races, the report said. "Through sameness of language is produced sameness of sentiment and thought ... In the difference of language today lies two-thirds of our trouble."[59]

Schools with compulsory attendance laws were the agents of assimilation, wherein the Indian children's "barbarous dialects should be blotted out and the English language substituted." The Peace Commission saw no other alternative. "The object of greatest solicitude should be to break down the prejudice of tribe among the Indians," it said. "To blot out the boundary lines which divide them into

distinct nations, and fuse them into one homogeneous mass. Uniformity of language will do this — nothing else will."[60]

Meanwhile, newly elected President Grant had softened his stance considerably. On the advice of a delegation of influential Quakers, he agreed to institute a policy based on peace and kindness rather than military force. The government was fully aware of the pressure that white miners, farmers and other settlers were forcing on the tribes in the West, and the Grant administration's approach would be one of conquering with kindness and understanding. As historian Robert Utley observed, "suddenly and inexplicably, the nation's preeminent warrior seemed to have gone over to the enemy." Utley explained, however, that in actuality there was nothing at all fresh or humane in the Grant Peace Policy. At the same time, the president had also warned that "Those who do not accept this policy will find the new administration ready for a sharp and severe war policy."[61]

Grant's Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Nathaniel G. Taylor, agreed with the Peace Commission's findings as well as the tenets of Grant's Peace Policy, saying that the government's duty as "guardian" of the Indians was to provide a secure home and the opportunity to change their barbarous habits. His statement that "it is beyond question our most solemn duty to protect and care for, to elevate and civilize them"[62] is an indication of the government's shift away from regarding Indians as sovereign nations and toward the view of Indians as dependent wards.

Grant's Peace Policy as implemented after the 1868 election called for a system of reservations along with full citizenship after a process of education and Christianization. The objective was full assimilation into the larger population. Control of Indian affairs would stay with the Department of the Interior, but the military would be present as a peace-keeping force, making sure that neither whites nor Indians crossed reservation boundaries. The policy was an attempt to keep contact between the races to a minimum and thus end the Indian wars.[63]

One of Grant's first actions regarding Indians was to ask Congress to appropriate funds to form a 10-member Board of Indian Commissioners. The board's mission was to oversee federal policy and to make sure that the provisions of the Peace Commission were carried out. Commissioner of Indian Affairs Ely S. Parker characterized the relationship between the BIA and the U.S. Army as one of complete harmony. While the civilian department worked toward the goals of education and civilization, its military partner was there to control the Indians who refused to comply with its humanitarian efforts.

The newly formed Board of Indian Commissioners, meanwhile, prepared a report that reiterated many of the views of the Peace Commission. The board blamed lawless white settlers and soldiers as "the chief obstacle in the way of Indian civilization," and charged that the failed policies of the past had made the Indians "suspicious, revengeful, and cruel in their retaliation."[64] The key to reversing this pattern of failure, the board decided, was to collect the Indians on

small reservations and teach them to become citizens. Again, the English language was emphasized as a main part of the path to civilization. The board also concluded that Christian mission schools should be encouraged because "the religion of our blessed Saviour is believed to be the most effective agent for the civilization of any people."[65]

Treaties written just before the government ended the practice of treaty-making in the late 1860s reflected the belief that education was of vital importance to the Indians. Article 7 of a treaty with the Sioux in 1868, for example, made schooling compulsory for all Indian children between ages six and sixteen. "In order to insure the civilization of the Indians entering into this treaty, the necessity of education is admitted,"[66] the document stated. Other treaties made that same year with the Cheyenne, Arapaho, and Navajo tribes required the same mandatory education.

One of the principal negotiators in these treaties in the late 1860s was General William Tecumseh Sherman, but the presence of such a renowned military figure drew criticism from Christian reformers who disagreed with the general's methods of using the Army to force the Indians into submission. Sherman insisted, however, that only a strong military force could guarantee peace and thus save the Indians from extinction.[67] Others on the frontier agreed. Territorial Governor Edward McCook of Colorado argued for a transfer of all Indian affairs to the Department of

War. He wanted a policy that would force the Indians to stay on the reservations and become completely dependent on the government for their subsistence.[68]

Governor McCook wrote eloquently in 1870 about the unfairness of allowing Indians to hinder white society's manifest destiny on the North American continent. "God gave to us the earth, and the fullness thereof," he said, "in order that we might utilize and enjoy His gifts." Objecting to a treaty that had conveyed prime agricultural and mining land to the tribes, he added, "I do not believe in donating to these indolent savages the best portion of my territory ... It is unjust to the white and of no real benefit to the red man."[69]

In some areas of the West, however, reservation lands had proved to be entirely unsuitable for agriculture, and the government, therefore, was seeing poor results in its efforts to transform the Natives from hunters into farmers. Missionaries continued working as actively as ever to produce a civilized Indian society capable of being assimilated and made citizens of the United States. But forced to farm arid prairie land and with "hunger gnawing at his vitals,"[70] as one Dakota missionary put it, the Indian was not always receptive.

The difficulty of persuading Native Americans to adopt farming as a way of life illustrates two opposing views of the world. Tribal life and culture was defined by a connection to the land and wild resources that was much different than the Euro-American concept of individual ownership and agriculture. A Walla Walla Indian named Pierre expressed this sacred-like tie between the land and native

culture at a council organized by the Board of Indian Commissioners in Oregon in 1871. The board was trying to negotiate a purchase of reservation lands, but Pierre expressed no interest in money. "I will never part with or sell this land," he said. "I love this country ... The land is the same to me as my body."[71] Native Americans traditionally thought of the land as a tribal asset that could not be parceled out and owned by individuals.

The Influence of Education

The government continued to subsidize Christian missionary schools through contracts with the various churches. The humanitarian aims of the missionaries fit in well with the goal of peace under the Grant administration. One of the Sisters of Charity teaching in the Tulalip Indian Schools in Washington reported to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs that she was encouraged at the progress shown among her students. She said that under the influence of education, several children had forgotten their former ways of life, and many of the girls had expressed "a great desire to place themselves in the Sisters' Asylum, and thus escape the degrading and demoralizing life to which they are exposed by their wicked and designing parents."[72]

The use of native language in those schools became a hot topic of debate during the 1870s. Missionaries and government officials did not waiver in their belief that education, religion and civilization comprised the only alternative to the

death of Indians as a race. Some, however, demanded outright eradication of aboriginal languages while others held to the idea that children learned all subjects most efficiently when materials were presented to them in their own languages. Opinions ranged from the Army officer at the Umatilla Reservation in Oregon, who said that English should be the only language used or spoken,[73] to missionary teacher John P. Williamson in the Dakota Territory who advocated translating as many books as possible into the "mother tongue." The first principle of education, Williamson wrote, was to teach ideas, not words, and if the students did not understand the language of the teacher, no ideas were learned. He said it took up to six years for an Indian child to learn English well enough to understand such ideas. "Is it right to pass by their Native tongue, the natural vehicle for the conveyance of truth, and spend half a dozen years preparing some other mode of conveyance for our truths, which we think so necessary to their improvement, temporally and spiritually?" he asked. "The primary steps in education must be given in the mother tongue."[74]

Felix Brunot, Chairman of the Board of Indian Commissioners, made his feelings on the subject known in a report following his trip to several western reservations in the summer of 1871. He wrote that acquisition of the English language was the area in which Indians had made the least progress toward the goal of civilization. It was clear to him that Indians showed the best success in shifting away from their native languages when they were enrolled in schools that required

the complete dominance of English. Brunot added that the best Indian speaker of English he knew of was one who spent two years in jail where he heard or spoke no other language.[75]

Minutes of a conference of the Board of Indian Commissioners held in Washington, D.C. in January, 1872, reveal the depth of disagreement over the language issue. With Felix Brunot presiding over the debate, missionary teachers argued both sides, and the group failed to reach any consensus. Samuel Janney, who was superintendent of Indian affairs in Nebraska and prominent in the Quaker church, praised the work of the missionaries. He recommended that the schools accommodate all children of all tribes, but that their goal in the long-term should be to teach the children nothing but English.[76] S.B. Treat of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions responded by telling the group of the advances toward Christian civilization his society had made by teaching the Indians in their own languages. He said that fifty-five years of teaching in Choctaw and Cherokee and experience with tribal groups in other nations had convinced his group of the efficiency of "vernacular teaching."[77] John C. Lowrie of the Presbyterian church summed up that side of the debate by asserting that missionaries should not lose sight of the goals of imparting the Gospel and civilization. "You have greater access to the mind of a people through their own tongue than through a foreign one," he said.[78]

The men continued the language debate two years later at the third annual conference of the board. Lowrie began by saying that success in teaching English to Indian children is often misinterpreted. In many cases the students show an ability to read and recite English words but have no understanding of their meaning or context. Lowrie contended that many teachers do not appreciate the difficulty of acquiring a second language and are too impatient for results. He supported the teaching of English, but said that it would be a long process and would require teaching materials in the native languages and teachers who spoke those languages "so both teachers and scholars have a common ground to stand on."[79]

Janney disagreed. He said that Indian children adapt quickly, and he cited cases where students had learned to read English in six months without merely repeating words in a "parrot-like" manner. He added that it was not necessary for teachers to know the native language and that if it were, it would be impossible to find enough people to meet the demand.[80]

To board member William E. Dodge, the issue was a simple one. The goal of assimilation required total abandonment of cultural differences, and native languages were vestiges of an aboriginal culture that had to be folded into a homogenous American society. "It appears to me, as our country is becoming connected by railroads, that these people should come out and speak our language," Dodge said. "When we spend these vast sums of money for these Indians, it ought

not to be to encircle them in a fence by themselves, but to bring them out into the broad position of Americans, speaking English."[81]

The Board of Indian Commissioners failed to agree on the subject of native language use, and individual missionary societies remained ambivalent as well. Within the Presbyterian Church, for example, the membership represented the full range of opinion from teacher John Copley, who declared the Omaha language to be useless as a tool for teaching Christian values, to F.F. Ellinwood, who wrote that "no work that is worthy of a Church board can be carried on without great resort to the native tongue in the preaching of the Gospel."[82] Michael Coleman in his detailed history of Presbyterian missionary work among American Indians wrote that it was only on the subject of native language use that the Presbyterians exhibited a lack of clearly defined goals. Church members were strongly unified in their mission of converting, educating and civilizing the Indians, Coleman observed, but they "showed a surprising vagueness" on the question of whether they should work for the immediate replacement of the native languages with English or, alternatively, use the native languages as teaching tools.

Presbyterian teacher George Ainslee produced a Choctaw dictionary, and his fellow missionary Sue McBeth compiled a similar work in Nez Perce. Coleman suggested that the church simultaneously operated under two assumptions in the nineteenth century: first, that English would eventually become the language spoken by Native Americans and therefore had to be taught in the schools, and,

second, that in order to reach that goal, much of the teaching in the short-term would have to be done in the native languages.[83]

An Indian agent from Puyallup, Washington, expressed the mood of many in the country who demanded that the government "stop raising generations of worthless and costly savages."[84] The agent called for a system of schools that would take Indian children away from the degrading influences of their tribe and place them under the constant care of educators. In an off-reservation industrial boarding school environment, the Indian children would grow to be hard-working citizens known only as "Americans of Indian descent." A key to the civilizing process would be replacing their native languages with that of the dominant society. Such a plan, the agent said, "would much better become the character and dignity of our Government than to leave them to be exterminated by the bullets of her soldiers and by whiskey."[85]

The system of industrial boarding schools became one of the government's agencies of assimilation after 1880. Federal policy to that point in the nineteenth century was driven not only by the desire for nationalistic unity, but also by the government's need to guarantee safety for white settlers as they advanced westward across the continent. By 1880, with the tribes mostly defeated, the emphasis turned exclusively toward bringing Indians – through education, Christianity, and agriculture – peacefully into mainstream American society. The demand for nationalistic unity and a common language had strongly influenced

federal policy since the founding days of the republic, but in the last twenty years of the nineteenth century the emphasis on English became even more intense, with the system of federal Indian schools as a focal point. Native tribes could not be allowed to stand in the way of either the nation's cultural uniformity or the progress of its expansion across the continent.

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Chapter 5

'Cult of Nationalism' 1880-1900

While a strong religious strain continued to dominate government-sponsored Indian education, a new "cult of nationalism"[1] took shape during the 1880s. This thinking demanded fervent patriotism from the country's native dependent tribes as well as from its growing number of foreign immigrants. Accompanying the plan to civilize through a system of off-reservation industrial boarding schools was the increasingly popular idea of allotting individual parcels of land to the Indians for agriculture. Allotment of land to the Indians in severalty was seen as the only way to induce the Natives to give up hunting and to teach them the values of hard work and proprietorship of private property. In 1876 Secretary of the Interior Zachariah Chandler proclaimed the allotment plan "the next great step to be taken"[2] in the long process of civilization. That same year Commissioner of Indian Affairs John Q. Smith wrote that with dwindling game populations, the Indians were "destined to speedy extinction" if they did not "begin in earnest to provide for their own wants by labor in civilized pursuits."[3] A later commissioner, Ezra A. Hayt, saw the loss of the buffalo on the Great Plains as a blessing, showing the Indians that they had no alternative to earning their living as civilized farmers rather than as hunters

and gatherers of wild resources.[4] Meanwhile, General Phillip Sheridan, a Civil War hero who had since turned his attention to the Indian wars in the West, was more blunt. In praising the work of the hunters who had slaughtered the herds, he declared, "These men have done more in the last two years, and will do more in the next year, to settle the vexed Indian question than the entire regular army has done in the last thirty years. They are destroying the Indians' commissary."[5]

Industrial Boarding Schools

Off-reservation industrial boarding schools established by the BIA beginning in the late 1870s were a rigid combination of military discipline, manual training, and indoctrination into white Christian society. The first such institutions were at Hampton, Virginia; Carlisle, Pennsylvania; and Forest Grove, Oregon. Hayt expressed confidence that the civilizing influences of these schools would far exceed those available at reservation schools, and administrators at the industrial schools sent encouraging reports to Washington. Richard Henry Pratt, the Army lieutenant who took charge at Carlisle, reported to the Secretary of the Interior in 1880 that progress showed by the 239 children of various western tribes was "most gratifying." M.C. Wilkinson of the Forest Grove school said, meanwhile, that results in his first year "fully justify the wisdom of a complete separation of Indian children from their parents and the debasing influences of their homes."[6]

The curriculum at the industrial boarding schools was based, first and foremost, on mastery of the English language. Educators assumed that advancement in all areas inside and outside the classroom began from that foundation. As proof of the rightness of the English-only policy, Principal S.C. Armstrong of the Hampton school printed letters from fathers of children in his charge. All encouraged the students to learn to be carpenters, farmers, and blacksmiths, and to learn to speak the language of the white man.[7]

Armstrong quoted one of his students, a Lower Brule Sioux named Phillip Councillor, as saying that he decided to enroll at Hampton after being favorably impressed by some boys who had attended the Virginia institute and had returned to the village. "I know this," Councillor wrote. "The people are changing towards the good, and if no one is to help them, how can they get it? I am an Indian and don't know anything. I am at home and see those Hampton boys, and seemed to me they learned many things at Hampton, and I will come and learn them too."[8]

But the intent was not only to teach English, but actually to eradicate the native languages. At Carlisle, Pratt instilled in teachers the conviction that mastery of English should be the object of every classroom session. He gave rewards to students who spoke nothing but English for extended periods of time, and he boasted that nearly every student in school had earned such recognition. "Ignorance of our language is the greatest obstacle to the assimilation of the Indians with our population," Pratt wrote. "It will be better for all when tribal

names, distinctions, and languages are obliterated." To him, the schools on the reservations were far less successful than the off-reservation boarding schools because the former only served to "keep the Indians a separate and peculiar people forever ... Without experience outside the tribe, they will never gain courage for other than tribal life."[9]

Pratt's opinions fit perfectly with the nationalistic temper of the 1880s and 1890s. Secretary of the Interior Henry M. Teller expressed the mood as well when he said that civilization and savagery could not exist together, and that it would be better for the Indians to disappear as a race than to remain savage and thus "contaminate and curse"[10] the rest of American society. Teller recommended increasing the size of the boarding schools so that at least half of all Indian children could receive the benefit of such training. By 1886, the number of boarding schools supervised by the federal government numbered eighty-five, with a total Indian attendance of 4,817.[11]

But the off-reservation boarding schools had their critics as well. W.H. Gray, an Indian agent in Oregon, told John Eaton of the Bureau of Education that his forty-three years of experience working with tribes in the West had convinced him that schooling in the native language and in the environment of the home village was far superior to "the policy of taking native children from their tribe, educating and returning them to instruct and civilize their several tribes." Gray cited the success teachers in one Oregon school had achieved because of their fluency in the

Nez Perce language. Both teachers in that school, Gray said, "could speak it readily and explain to the native pupils the meaning of every word in both languages, and by this means make the study of our language an easy and interesting exercise."[12]

Gray added, however, that he had seen increasing interest in the boarding schools among the Native people themselves. Fifty children from his area had enrolled at Hampton, he said, and the local tribes would send "thousands" more if the school could accommodate them. But the results returning students had shown were proof to him that schooling at such a distant and foreign location was a mistake. Not one of the full-blooded Native students, he said, had been able to move successfully into the world of jobs and American society. He was surprised "at the shortsighted policy that attempts at the present day to carry out so hopeless a plan in reference to our Indian population." In his opinion, the Native student returning to the village after a Hampton education was destined for failure. "The surroundings of the native child have been and are today such that he must descend to the level of his people or assume, as he generally does, an intolerable and disgusting superiority over his kindred. Losing all his influence, he disappoints the expectations of his friends to improve the condition of his tribe."[13]

The off-reservation industrial schools were only part of the government's plan for assimilation, as the years from 1880 to 1900 saw the fiercest civilian campaign of the nineteenth century against Native American language and culture. With the Indian wars won in the West, the tribes confined to reservations, and the

buffalo herds decimated, the government set out through a series of laws and policies to create an Indian population that would fit the image of white America and be able to make a living in the modern economy. In February, 1887, Congress passed and President Grover Cleveland signed into law the long-awaited General Allotment Act. Commissioner of Indian Affairs Edward P. Smith had said during the Grant administration at least twelve years earlier that personal property and individual toil were the first steps in breaking up tribal identity. The law, also known as the Dawes Act for its prime sponsor Senator Henry L. Dawes of Massachusetts, was aimed at dividing the tribally owned reservation lands into small tracts for individual ownership. Proponents believed that private property would motivate the Native owners to improve themselves and the land through agriculture.

In order for such ambitions to become reality, however, the Indians had to receive a proper education and extensive training in manual labor. For years before the passage of the allotment law, Dawes had been discussing these special education and training needs of the Natives with men such as Richard Henry Pratt of the Carlisle Indian School. Dawes wrote Pratt in 1881 that he wanted "to see every Indian child taught at least this much: first to work; next, to know that what he earns is his." Pratt responded to Dawes with a statement of his own philosophy of Indian education. "The sooner all tribal relations are broken up, the sooner the

Indian loses all his Indian ways, even his language, the better it will be for him and for the government and the greater will be the economy to both."[14]

John D.C. Atkins and the English-Only Rules

The movement had strong support within government. Commissioner of Indian Affairs John D.C. Atkins agreed with the Dawes plan, saying that Indians "must abandon their tribal relations and take lands in severalty as the cornerstone of their complete success in agriculture." To Atkins, the allotment act was a sign of the country's "great heart" and "humanity" in Indian affairs.[15] In Atkins, Pratt also found a staunch supporter of the English-only policy of teaching Native children, and the commissioner quickly wrote rules demanding such practices in the Indian schools under his control. Atkins's pronouncements on the subject led to a serious rift between the federal secular schools and the various missionary societies still supported by government contracts. He was eager to put the force of law behind the policy of native language suppression, and he refused to acknowledge any dissent from that position among politicians or government officials. Responding in 1884 to a report that instruction in a federally funded school in the Dakotas was given in both the Sioux language and in English, he issued firm orders requiring English only, and promised that government support would be withdrawn if instruction in the native language did not stop.[16] In 1886 he proclaimed, "There is not an Indian pupil whose tuition and maintenance is paid by the United States

Government who is permitted to study any other language than our own vernacular — the language of the greatest, most powerful, and enterprising nationalities beneath the sun. The English language as taught in America is good enough for all her people of all races."[17]

Atkins's language rules as written in December, 1886, required that "In all schools conducted by missionary organizations it is required that all instruction shall be given in the English language." In February, 1887, he followed with an order to all teachers that "Instruction of the Indians in the vernacular is not only of no use to them, but is detrimental to the cause of their education and civilization, and no school will be permitted on the reservation in which the English language is not exclusively taught." And in July he clarified the issue further by saying that "No books in any Indian language must be used or instruction given in that language to Indian pupils in any school where this office has entered into contract for the education of Indians. ... The instruction of Indians in the vernacular ... will not be permitted in any Indian school over which the government has any control, or in which it has any interest whatever."[18] The rules went on to say that "the vernacular" could be used in missionary schools for moral and religious instruction, but that such teaching must yield to the English language as soon as possible. Use of the Bible printed in any native language was not to be prevented, but it was not to interfere with the teaching of English.

Reports sent to the Bureau of Indian Affairs indicate that teachers in secular BIA schools generally agreed with Atkins's statement. An instructor from a school in Albuquerque, New Mexico, reported that his difficulty in "getting pupils to give up their own language for the English" was almost entirely overcome. He said that the school's success in converting the students to English speakers was due to a "rigid system of scrutiny and daily reporting." Although he did not explain the disciplinary measures used to enforce the English-only rule, he did say that "pupils who were found unwilling to conform to milder regulations were compelled to submit to it [and] as a consequence in a short time there was a radical change for the better."[19]

At the Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute in Virginia, English speaking was the basis of all activity inside and outside the classroom. "It is the law of the school," principal S.C. Armstrong said, "and at roll-call every night, each reports on his or her adherence to it."[20] In the first year after passage of the allotment act, teachers at Hampton made a special effort to instill in their students the virtues of manual labor and the value of private property. Armstrong's description of the institute's goals was a classic definition of the Protestant work ethic. He said the school had worked to "impress the Indians with the thought that the idle, aimless, dependent life of the past is almost over, that in the future it will be 'work or starve,' and that only by the 'blistered hands of toil can their own or

any race be civilized.' To learn the meaning of a real purpose in life, and to hold to it with true Christian earnestness, seems the lesson of the hour for our scholars."[21]

To many of those missionary teachers who had worked hard to learn the native language of their students and to teach in that language, it was made clear that their methods of instruction would have to change. Charles McChesney, the agent at the Cheyenne River Agency in the Dakotas, provided one example. He reported to Atkins in 1887 that in nine schools subsidized by the government and administered by Episcopalian and Congregational churches Indian teachers were still teaching in the Indian language. But subsequent to recent orders by the department, McChesney said, those schools would have to close or be taught exclusively in English. He added that the wisdom of such an order could not be questioned. "To teach the rising generation of the Sioux in their native tongue is simply to teach the perpetuation of something that can be of no benefit whatever to them," McChesney wrote. "The object is to make these Indians an English-speaking people, and surely it has been abundantly demonstrated that in order to teach them English it is not necessary nor is it any material advantage to them to have received instruction in their native tongue. On the contrary, it retards their progress in English."[22]

The passage of time only served to harden Atkins's resolve, and the prevailing opinion within government was that continuation of the native language was detrimental to the Indians' progress toward civilization and citizenship. In

Atkins's view, the purpose of education was to enable Native Americans to live and work with English-speaking people and that "teaching an Indian youth in his own barbarous dialect is a positive detriment to him." He went on to state his case in military terms reminiscent of the wars recently won over the tribes, and he insisted that it was not cruel to force Indians to abandon their native languages.

> Is it cruelty to the Indian to force him to give up his scalping knife and tomahawk? Is it cruelty to force him to abandon the vicious and barbarous sun dance, where he lacerates his flesh, and then dances and tortures himself even unto death? Is it cruelty to the Indian to force him to have his daughters educated and married under the laws of the land, instead of selling them at a tender age for a stipulated price into concubinage to gratify the brutal lusts of ignorance and barbarism?[23]

Resentment flared early in 1888 in response to a circular published the previous July in which Atkins established explicit federal rules prohibiting use of native languages in government-sponsored schools. The commissioner had already earned the enmity of missionary societies with his contention that government should not be involved in religious education and that it should end its practice of funding mission schools. Now church groups charged that Atkins was meddling in their long-standing and successful practice of teaching Christianity to the Natives

in their own languages. At a conference in Philadelphia in March, 1888, the Methodist Episcopal Church formally protested the government's new rules and sent a resolution directly to President Grover Cleveland. The group acknowledged some advantages to teaching the English language to Native Americans, but it said that prohibiting the use of native languages would hinder the ability of Indian students to learn effectively. Specifically, the Methodist Episcopal members resented government interference in church policy and the expulsion of native language religious materials from mission schools.[24]

Cleveland responded quickly with an open letter printed in *The New York Times*, expressing surprise and disappointment in the group's protest. He said the government was misunderstood and that it had never intended to restrict the use of translations of the Bible or other materials in religious education, and he explained that the rules apply to "ordinary secular education, and do not refer to religious or moral teaching."[25]

The president fully endorsed the rules his commissioner had established requiring exclusive use of English in schools subsidized by the federal government. He declared that all the efforts of educators should be toward the total assimilation of Natives into the one American community, and the English language was a weapon Indians needed to use in their struggle for citizenship. "It will not do," the president wrote, "to permit these wards of the nation, in their preparation to

become their own masters, to indulge in their barbarous language because it is easier for them or because it pleases them."[26]

The New York Times supported the government's policy in an editorial printed the same day Cleveland's letter appeared. It presented the same arguments for assimilation of the Natives, and added that it was absolutely essential that the Indians "learn the language of those with whom they are destined to come into contact, and to accomplish this, it is necessary to confine their instruction to English."[27]

A later editorial in the *Times* criticized the Ohio Congregational Society for protesting against the federal native language policy. The paper said that the society was mistaken in its belief that the government was attempting to control education in independent missionary schools with which it had no connection. The English-only policy applied only to missionary and secular schools that were supported wholly or in part by government funds. The rule was necessary, the *Times* continued, because instruction to Indian children in the native languages was "a detriment and drawback, prejudicing them also against the Government schools where English only is taught."[28]

These cries of protest from missionary groups that had always been friendly to the government's Indian policies prompted a hurried clarification from Commissioner Atkins. On April 16, 1888, he published "Correspondence on the Subject of Teaching the Vernacular in Indian Schools 1887-88." The 27-page

pamphlet reiterated the rules he had printed the previous July and explained that several religious societies had misinterpreted the intent of those rules. Atkins emphasized that "The order does not affect preaching or praying, or the maintenance or conduct of religious services of any description, at any time or place, in any language."[29] Its sole intention was the prohibition of textbooks in native languages as part of the non-religious curriculum in any Indian school that received government funds. Atkins said that deeper consideration of the subject had only strengthened his convictions. "When they take upon themselves the responsibilities and privileges of citizenship, their vernacular will be of no advantage."[30]

To Atkins the native languages were innately inferior to English. They were suited only to communicating savage thoughts and had no capacity to express the refined ideas of modern civilization. Referring to a translation of the Bible in the Dakota language, he asserted that

> ... it is so imperfect that words have to be coined to enable many of the ideas that are contained in the Bible to be expressed in Dakota. The simple Dakota fails to express the idea ... These languages may be, and no doubt are, interesting to the philologist, but as a medium for conveying education and civilization to savages they are worse than

useless; they are a means of keeping them in their savage condition by perpetuating the traditions of carnage and superstition.[31]

Religious societies involved in Indian education were far from united in their opinions about the language issue. One Presbyterian group, for example, reported to the secretary of the interior that same year that the two matters of greatest benefit to the Indians were the division of their lands into individual allotments and the policy of teaching only English in their schools. The Presbyterians expressed "hearty sympathy"[32] with the government's language rules, and said that an English-only requirement was the best way to Americanize and Christianize not only Native Americans but also the country's immigrants.

The Board of Indian Commissioners also generally agreed with the language policy, even though some participants at the board's annual convention at Lake Mohonk, New York, steadfastly maintained their conviction that the most effective learning occurred when students were allowed to use their native languages. The board's official policy statement, however, reflected no dissension. It acknowledged the usefulness of the native languages in religious education, but said that there should be no disagreement that the English language should be predominant. The board added that "all admit the wisdom of requiring its exclusive use in the Government schools."[33]

Exactly who the board was referring to when it said "all admit" is not clear, because transcripts of the annual Lake Mohonk conventions present a picture of a religious community deeply divided over the language issue. At the 1888 convention, the Rev. Lyman Abbott presented a paper in which he stated that the government was absolutely right in "refusing to spend a dollar of the people's money to educate a pagan population in a foreign tongue." The purpose of education, Abbott said, was to teach literacy, industry, and the principles of right and wrong "to the Indian boy, who has picked up only the use of the tomahawk, the ethics of the campfire, and the vernacular of his own tribe."[34]

Mary C. Collins, a teacher from the Standing Rock Reservation, argued, however, that the government's policy was unjust. She told the convention that most of the success she had achieved in the classroom had been because of the use of the native language. "To reach the hearts of the people, we must reach them through the tongue they can understand."[35] Or, as another speaker at the same convention said, "I would rather have a good, honest Christian man, if he speaks Dakota, than to have him a scoundrel if he talks English."[36]

The language issue was a part of the more acrimonious debate over withdrawal of government support for missionary schools. With no compromise in sight, the forces in favor of an English-only policy stepped up their arguments against public funding for schools that allowed Native students to speak their own languages. If the missionaries wanted to continue that practice, they reasoned, let

them do it without government support. Other clergymen agreed, saying that education of the Indians was an obligation of the state alone, and that government should not depend on religious organizations to do its work. These reformers pushed also for laws that would make education compulsory for Indian children.

Thomas Jefferson Morgan

In 1889, with the election of President Benjamin Harrison, the forces that favored rapid assimilation of Native Americans had another commissioner of Indian affairs who strongly supported their cause. In fact, historian Francis Prucha has called Commissioner Thomas Jefferson Morgan "the most significant national figure in Indian education in the nineteenth century."[37] Morgan's campaign against Native American language and culture over the next four years continued and even accelerated the federal government's efforts at civilization and acculturation of the tribes. A former Army officer who served under Benjamin Harrison in the Civil War, Morgan proclaimed that education was the "final solution"[38] to the Indian question.

He explained his goals for the Indian schools clearly in his first annual report as commissioner. "When we speak of the education of the Indians," he wrote,

> we mean that comprehensive system of training and instruction which will convert them into American citizens ... Education is to be the

> medium through which the rising generation of Indians are to be brought into fraternal and harmonious relationship with their white fellow citizens, and with them enjoy the sweets of refined homes, the delight of social intercourse, the emoluments of commerce and trade, the advantages of travel, together with the pleasures that come from literature, science, and philosophy, and the solace and stimulus afforded by a true religion.[39]

A key part of Morgan's plan was a federal law making education compulsory for the Indians. It was the basis of their salvation, he said, and without it they were a doomed race. Additionally, he outlined a curriculum taught exclusively in English and emphasizing fervent patriotism. To him, this plan for education was not only liberal, but also supremely humanitarian, coming from a Christian nation that could just as easily crush these inferior tribes as save them. As part of his design for grammar schools, he said that Native children should be taught the proud history of the United States government as the friend and benefactor of American Indians. Students should know about the lives of the great heroes of American history and should be made to feel pride in the achievements of the nation's founders. Just as importantly, Morgan directed that the children should be told little or nothing about the "wrongs" committed by Indians in the past. And they should be equally protected from hearing about any injustices of the white

race. "If their unhappy history is alluded to," Morgan wrote, "it should be to contrast it with the better future that is within their grasp." He added that the function of the schools should be to awaken in Indian children a sense of gratitude to the nation for all the opportunities it has afforded to their people.[40] Morgan instructed teachers of Indian children to "carefully avoid any unnecessary reference to the fact that they are Indians."[41]

As the first step in ensuring that his ideas were put into practice, Morgan issued his official "Rules for Indian Schools" in 1890. The document reiterated that the government's purpose in educating Native youth was to prepare them for assimilation, work, and eventual American citizenship. It involved training in academic fields, industrial and domestic skills, and culture, morality, and character. The rules covered every detail of school life, from the course of study for each year down to the specific duties of cooks, clerks and laundresses. It spelled out daily routines for classrooms, evening and weekend activities, and proper clothing.

Rule number 41 dealt with the language issue, specifying that "All instruction must be in the English language. Pupils must be compelled to converse with each other in English, and should be properly rebuked or punished for persistent violation of this rule. Every effort should be made to encourage them to abandon their tribal language. To facilitate this work it is essential that all school employees be able to speak English fluently, and that they speak English exclusively to the pupils, and also to each other in the presence of pupils."[42]

Morgan pushed as hard for a compulsory attendance law as he did for language suppression. He firmly believed that it was the government's obligation to ensure that every Indian child had access to white civilization through the education system. Indian parents should be the natural guardians of their children, he said, but when those parents refused to send their children to school, the government was justified in taking over as custodian. Indian children who were not thus prepared for citizenship were, in Morgan's view, "wellnigh certain to grow up idle, vicious, or helpless, a menace or a burden to the public."[43] Compulsory attendance, then, was not only a matter of public safety but also a duty to protect the welfare of the people Morgan saw as the wards of the nation. It was a fulfillment of the government's responsibility to "save him from vice and fit him for citizenship."[44]

Morgan made similar statements at every opportunity, including a speech to a conference of missionary boards in Washington, D.C., in January, 1891. There he met the enthusiastic support of Richard H. Pratt of the Carlisle Institute. Pratt used the occasion to explain the basis for the thinking to which he and others such as Morgan and Sen. Henry L. Dawes subscribed. To them, the native language and other cultural characteristics were not born into the Indian population; they were learned habits picked up as the result of unfortunate circumstances and environment. That was a key point because they believed that learned habits could be unlearned, and assimilation could occur through the civilizing influences of

education. "There is no resistless clog placed upon us by birth," Pratt said. "We are not born with language, nor are we born with ideas of either civilization or savagery. Language, savagery, and civilization are forced upon us entirely by our environment after birth."[45] He urged therefore, that the government change the environment of Indian children to ensure that they adopt a civilized language and habits.

Later in the same speech, Pratt pointed to the level of equality that had been achieved at the time by Negro Americans. The Negroes, he observed, "were savages of a very low state when brought to this country. Now, through environment, they are English speaking and fellow citizens." The Negro had "worked his way into citizenship and manly self-support,"[46] so the Indian could do so as well. Modern researcher Jon Reyhner has suggested, however, that these efforts to quickly force Indian students to adopt the white man's ways actually fostered resentment and slowed the process of assimilation. He contended that many Indian students educated in BIA schools at the time failed to become an integral part of American society and returned to the reservations determined to resist the forces of acculturation and thereby retain their native languages and cultures.[47]

In his book *The Middle Five,* Francis La Flesche offers a student's view of the inner workings of a Presbyterian boarding school in late nineteenth century Nebraska and the origins of those feelings of resentment. Writing nearly thirty

years after leaving the school, La Flesche recalled the strict discipline and the harsh physical punishment administered by a teacher he called Gray-beard. "The vengeful way in which he fell upon that innocent boy created in my heart a hatred that was hard to conquer," he wrote. "I tried to reconcile the act of Gray-beard with the teachings of the missionaries, but I could not do so from any point of view."[48] The school prohibited the use of native languages anywhere on the grounds, and upon their enrollment, children received new names, often the names of famous Americans. La Flesche described the scene as one father brought his son to the school and La Flesche translated as the man said in the language of the Omaha tribe, "my wife wishes her son, this boy, to learn to speak the language of the Big-knives." The boy was promptly named Edwin M. Stanton, and other boys took names such as William T. Sherman, Philip Sheridan, and Abraham Lincoln. Even though discipline was harsh and the boarding school took children away from home at an early age, parents in La Flesche's view welcomed the opportunity the school provided. La Flesche quoted his own father as telling him, "that you might profit by the teaching of your own people and that of the white race, and that you might avoid the misery which accompanies ignorance, I placed you in the House of Teaching."[49]

La Flesche's example points out the complex, tortuous choices that Native Americans faced. He described himself as an eager student, an "exceptionally bright scholar" who learned English quickly and advanced easily through the

grades. He went on to earn a law degree, and he spent a long career with the American Bureau of Ethnology, working to record and preserve Native American traditions and customs. While his choices took him away from his family and tribe, his education gave him the skills he needed in order to work for the advancement of his native culture. The education system provided opportunities for La Flesche and others to help their people. Historian Richard White concluded that the alternative that many Native Americans chose was "purposeful modernization, which involved the acceptance not only of modern technology but also of much of the attendant social organization and values of the larger society. The goal of this modernization was not assimilation, but rather the retention of an independent national identity by a group in control of its own destiny."[50]

Education for Assimilation

Commissioner of Indian Affairs Morgan applauded the compulsory education law passed in 1891, which gave his office the power to "enforce by proper means the regular attendance of Indian children of suitable age and health at schools established for their benefit."[51] Teachers in Indian schools also expressed their support for the law. The superintendent of the Harrison Institute in Chemawa, Oregon, for example, wrote that under the force of government, the Natives would learn that "education is a national business rather than mere play at doing something which the Indian could submit to or not as might suit his uncultured

ideas."[52] In 1893, the law was strengthened by giving government officials the authority to cut off rations to Indian parents who refused to comply.

Morgan's work toward reform and assimilation of Native Americans reached even into the business of changing the personal names of individual Indians. With the allotment act in full swing, Morgan told Indian agents and school superintendents that property records would require that all members of each family have the same family name. Like the everyday use of the English language, modern naming practices were among the customs of white people that Indians would have to adopt, Morgan said. He advised shortening Indian surnames if they were difficult to pronounce, and then giving English Christian names before them. His instructions also said that the practice of calling Indians by the English translation of their Indian names should be abandoned because the resulting names were "usually awkward and uncouth."[53] Morgan sent a copy of his instructions on personal names to John Wesley Powell, who was director of the federal Bureau of Ethnology. Powell, one of the most well-known experts on Indian linguistics of his day, readily agreed with the commissioner's policy. He suggested that a modern system of personal names was important not only to property records, but also to the job of collecting accurate census information. Additionally, Powell said that the instructions given by Morgan would "tend strongly toward the breaking up of the Indian tribal system which is perpetuated and ever kept in mind by the Indians' own system of names."[54]

Another of Morgan's main goals was to see an end of government subsidies to missionary societies involved in Indian education. The debate took on an ugly anti-Catholic, anti-immigrant tone, with Protestants arguing that government contracts unfairly favored the Catholic missions. In Morgan's view, a distinctive homogenous American civilization was English-speaking and Protestant Christian. The main reason for disfavor was foreign control of the Catholic Church and loyalty to the Pope. Morgan contended that the education provided to Indian children should exclusively represent American civilization, "not that of some foreign country — of Spain, or Portugal, or Mexico — but with that of the United States of America."[55]

Immigration and National Unity

Fear of the foreign influence in education arose out of the changing character of American immigration in the last two decades of the nineteenth century. Beginning in about 1880, people from southern and eastern Europe, who were predominantly Catholic and Jewish, outnumbered the mainly Anglo-Saxon and Protestant immigrants from northern and western Europe who had traditionally made up the majority of immigrants. The shift occurred with the rise of industrialization in northern and western Europe and the desire of people from Russia, Italy, Poland, Greece, Turkey, and the Balkan countries to escape poverty and overpopulation. Prior to 1880, the "Nordic" or "Caucasian stock" had

established itself in the United States and, according to one historian, "the economic background, social and political ideals of the old immigration led to its rapid assimilation into the prototype accepted as 'American.'"[56] But the new immigrants did not assimilate quickly. They established ethnic communities within urban areas and tried to maintain old-world social, religious, and cultural patterns. As an example of the dramatic change in national origin of American immigrants, in the 1860s southern and eastern Europeans were 1.5 percent of the immigrant population, and in the 1880s they were 18.3 percent. By contrast, in the 1860s northern and western Europeans were 87.8 percent of the immigrant population, and in the 1880s they were 72 percent. In the 60-year period from 1820 to 1880, Italy furnished 81,277 immigrants to the United States; in the 40-year period from 1880 to 1920, the number of Italian immigrants was 4,114,603.[57]

Nancy Conklin wrote in her study of language communities in the United States that most Americans considered southern and eastern Europeans to have been illiterate peasants in comparison to the immigrants of a generation before. They were "more foreign than and culturally inferior to their western European predecessors. Similarly, their languages were regarded as unfit for use by American citizens."[58] Thus Morgan's insistent nationalism with its emphasis on American English was a reaction to the new wave of immigrants. Participation in American society was open to anyone of any ethnic background, but one thing it demanded was the acceptance of English as the common language of commerce,

politics, religion, and law. As Conklin wrote, "learning English has naturally been fundamental to the assimilation process."[59] The new immigrants generally saw English as the language of opportunity, but at the same time they – at least the first generations – clung to familiar languages as a marker of ethnic identity.

Withdrawal of Federal Funding

The end of Morgan's term in office came when Grover Cleveland defeated Benjamin Harrison in the presidential election of 1892. Out of office, however, Morgan was free to step up his attacks on the Catholic Church. In speeches all over the country, he charged that it was impossible to be both a good American and a good Catholic. The sentiment grew with increasing numbers of immigrants from European Catholic nations and the resulting threat to the dominance of the Protestant religions.[60] The fear among many Americans that Catholics would soon gain control of the education system further fueled the cult of nationalism, and anti-Catholic forces targeted the new wave of immigrants as a threat to the public schools as well as to American national unity.[61]

The Protestant missionary societies withdrew totally from the government contract system in 1892, leaving the Catholics on their own in the fight for continued Congressional support. From then on, the anti-Catholic forces were able to focus their arguments against all government sponsorship of missionary schools. Morgan, for example, told the *New York Times* shortly after he left office that

"sectarian narrowness" had no place in the management of government institutions and ought to be "sternly rebuked."[62] In 1897 Congress approved a measure declaring its intention to "make no more appropriations whatever for education in any sectarian school."[63] By the end of the century, the practice had been entirely phased out.

The laws and regulations established by Morgan, Dawes and their supporters guided federal Indian policy through the end of the nineteenth century. Statements the two men made in favor of assimilation of Indians into mainstream American culture are so similar as to be virtually interchangeable. Writing in the *Atlantic Monthly*, Dawes declared that to permit the Indian "to be a roving savage was unendurable, and therefore the task of fitting him for civilized life was undertaken. This then is the present Indian policy of the nation — to fit the Indian for civilization and to absorb him into it."[64] Morgan placed Dawes among the most hallowed figures of western civilization. He said, "God in his wisdom called a Moses for the exodus and a Luther for the reformation and a Lincoln for the emancipation and a Henry L. Dawes for the citizenship of the Indian."[65]

Morgan's successors continued this crusade aimed at preparing the Indians for American civilization by destroying their language and culture. In 1899, Commissioner of Indian Affairs William A. Jones spoke of the education system and the allotment act as the basic tools in the work of assimilation. He wrote that through education, "their thoughts are turned from the teepee, the chase, and the

barbaric ease of a savage life ... to the ... manifest advantage of the white man's manners, customs, and habits." Hope for the Indian, he added "lies in taking the child at the tender age of four or five years ... and guiding it into the proper channel."[66]

Reports from superintendents of Indian schools indicate that in the last year of the century efforts to suppress the native languages had not slackened. From the school at Fort Mojave, Arizona, the superintendent wrote that while all "Indian talk" had not ceased, there was a "marked and encouraging increase of English speaking, and we hope in time to be able to report that it is the only language used at this school."[67]

So by the end of the 1800s, language, religion, and subsistence patterns had been drastically changed, but still the Indians resisted while the nation's leaders continued to believe they could achieve civilization by force. Government refused to admit that the strength of both its military and civilian sides, aided by countless Christian missionaries, could not instantly transform aboriginal cultures into modern Americans. However, as Robert Berkhofer asserted in his analysis of missionary activity among American Indians, positive success in the way of Christian civilization was unattainable because of America's racial attitudes. True civilization for the Indians would have required their full integration into white society; Native people failed to achieve that level of acculturation because "civilized Americans" refused to accept non-whites on equal terms. "By

discriminating against the aborigine upon the basis of a belief of white cultural superiority, Americans forced the Indian to remain savage and guaranteed the failure of the missionary program," Berkhofer wrote.[68] Historian Oscar Handlin observed further that popular "racialist ideas" led to a "fundamental ambiguity" in the thinking of late-nineteenth-century advocates of assimilation. Handlin was referring mainly to Catholic and Jewish immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe, but his comments apply as well to Native Americans. True assimilation could occur only through acceptance of minorities in the workplace, churches, schools, and residential areas. "Yet in practice," Handlin wrote, "the man who thought himself an Anglo-Saxon found proximity to the other folk ... uncomfortable and distasteful and, in his own life, sought to increase rather than to lessen the gap between his position and theirs."[69]

In 1872, at the height of the Grant administration's Peace Policy, Commissioner of Indian Affairs Francis A. Walker expressed the nation's feelings when he wrote that destiny would not allow a few scattered tribes to stop America's conquest of the continent. "The westward course of population is neither denied nor delayed for the sake of all the Indians that ever called this country their home," he declared. "They must yield or perish."[70] Government officials and Christian missionaries generally concurred that native languages were vestiges of a way of life that was destined to die out, even though they frequently disagreed about the value of those languages in teaching literacy and the habits of

civilized society. Historian Michael Coleman described Presbyterians as people who "responded to rich, complex, and diverse Indian cultures with an ethnocentrism that is breathtaking in its sweep, intensity, and consistency." While some expressed interest in the native languages, Coleman wrote, most missionaries constantly "hammered home the utter worthlessness of Indian ways." Even for those missionaries who saw some value in the native languages, "it is unlikely that these practices were anything more than tactics: ... the exploitation of one element of Indian culture as a weapon against the rest."[71]

Anthropologist David Maybury-Lewis has described this as a process of "ethnocide,"[72] in which the members of a dominant group argue that the disappearance of indigenous cultures is inevitable because those cultures cannot survive in the modern world and stand in the way of development. Ethnocide is the refusal of the dominant society to accept alternatives to cultural extinction. It is the assumption that minority groups are unable to adapt to changing conditions and that successful nations necessarily exhibit a homogenous national identity, leaving no room for pluralism. Bernd Peyer, in his history of Native American missionary writers, concluded that linguistic imperialism was part of America's plan for conquest of the tribes and that the education system was nothing more than "brainwashing whereby Indians were to be transformed into lower-class duplicates of Europeans." Rather than promoting a system in which bilingualism would be passed down from one generation of Native Americans to the next, which would

have strengthened Native Americans' position in society, the schools denigrated aboriginal languages through insistence on English only, and thereby "[gave] rise to conflicts of identity and feelings of inferiority."[73]

In 1868, the Indian Peace Commission noted that treaties made between the tribes and the United States were broken one after another not by the Indians but by the federal government. As white society pressed westward, it encroached on lands that had been promised by treaty to the Indians forever. To accommodate white settlers, the government was forced to negotiate new treaties, pushing the Indians even further back. The pattern was repeated time after time, and resentment and distrust built up among the tribes. In that respect, America did not live up to its own ideal of a civilized society. It violated treaties and encroached on Indian land, while at the same time proclaiming resistance to invaders as one of the virtues of civilization. When the Indian resisted, the Peace Commission wrote, "civilization, with the ten commandments in one hand and the sword in the other, demands his immediate extermination,"[74] but when he did not resist, he was scorned as lazy and cowardly. The United States wanted the Indians to adopt civilized habits that in most tribal affairs it did not practice itself. The Peace Commission acknowledged the paradox when it stated that it agreed that the Indians should not stand in the way of America's westward expansion, but it could not help "doubting the purity and genuineness of the civilization which reaches its ends by falsehood and violence, and dispenses blessings that spring from violated rights."[75] From the

Indians' point of view, white society, which occupied lands taken by force, provided no living example of the Christian civility it demanded of the Natives.

In terms of language policy, the government barely wavered from the start of the nineteenth century to the end, and educators, as one historian has concluded, "remained wedded to the Jeffersonian dream of turning them [Indians] into yeoman farmers and educated citizens."[76] Policy was continually driven by Americans' demand for cultural and national unity, and the value of a common language remained at the core of any such unity. The only difference was that by 1886 the Department of the Interior had written its language rules explicitly into school policy and had stated that its intention was not merely to teach Native Americans to use standard English, but actually to persuade them to abandon their aboriginal languages. Federal policy never acknowledged even the slightest intrinsic worth in the multitude of native languages and dialects spoken on the North American continent. The formula for civilizing Native Americans remained agriculture, Christianity, education, and private ownership of land. Except for those missionaries who saw its value as a teaching tool, the people involved in Indian affairs viewed language as an aspect of savagery that was better destroyed than tolerated. Historian Francis Prucha, in his analysis of Commissioner of Indian Affairs Thomas Jefferson Morgan, concluded that it is unfortunate that reformers of the time "had no appreciation of positive values in the Indian cultures." Their narrow view of a patriotic America and the "crushing attack of the allotment

program and the national school system" overshadows a genuine humanitarian desire to bring the benefits of education to Native Americans.[77] By 1900, suppression of native languages was strictly enforced in all schools that received government support. Federal restrictions could not, however, reach the missionary schools operated by various churches across the nation, and the languages remained in use in many of those. In one respect, the system of government contracts with missionary societies was good for native languages. Translations of written material and classroom instruction in the native languages were done almost exclusively by the churches and their teachers. Without federal support beginning in 1819, much of that work would not have been accomplished.

Many of the religious societies recognized the connection between language and culture, and they knew that the best way to change certain aspects of native life was by using a language the Natives could understand. "The line of power travels with the human heart, and the heart of the Indian is in his language,"[78] a group of Methodists and Episcopalians wrote in 1888 protesting the government's ban on native languages in schools. Federal bureaucrats understood the connection as well, and it was for that reason that they tried so hard to destroy the languages. Additionally, educators and agents of federal policy believed, correctly, that entry into modern systems of employment and self-support required a command of English. However, those who were involved in formulating the spirit of nationalism and delivering the program of education in nineteenth century America

did not see the possibility of allowing small nations within U.S. borders to have a separate national character and to maintain a minority language while also learning English. Policy makers of that era did not willfully reject a moral and peaceful solution to the conflict between the American nation and the Indian tribes. They acted within the limitations that the demands of a young expanding country placed on them, and they made choices knowing that a completely moral and peaceful solution was practically impossible. As Robert Keller observed in his history of the Grant Peace Policy, "Christian nations cannot always be moral."[79]

Many missionaries and federal Indian educators equated native language with barbarism and their own language with virtue. "Our noble English tongue has been likened to a vast arsenal, stored with weapons and armor of every pattern and design for every age," Merrill E. Gates of the Board of Indian Commissioners said in a lecture to teachers in 1899. "The word is life; and most of all God's word."[80] However, to the men who decided national policy in the nineteenth century, native language was a characteristic of an inferior culture that had no choice other than to adopt the ways of white society.

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Chapter 6

American 'Customs, Methods, and Language' in Alaska, 1867-1900

Alaska became a part of the United States during the post-Civil War period of fervent nationalistic feeling and rapid American expansion across the continent. It was a time during which the trans-continental railroad was completed, settlers opened new lands for agriculture, and a variety of people looking for opportunity populated the West. The federal government was occupied with making these lands safe for civilized settlement, and its policy in regard to native tribes was one of offering peace to those who stayed on the reservations and unconditional war on those who resisted. The federal government almost completely ignored Alaska Natives for the first seventeen years after the purchase from Russia in 1867.

In that year the nation knew practically nothing about the inhabitants or the geography of its new possession and, without establishing any form of civil government, Congress merely assigned the Army to man the outpost at Sitka. Many Americans who visited Alaska during the 1860s and 1870s, including the explorer and naturalist William H. Dall, who traveled with the Western Union Telegraph Expedition, and the Presbyterian missionary Sheldon Jackson, urged Congress and Interior Department officials to make special provisions for the

health and education of Alaska Natives. Jackson was especially worried about the demoralizing influence of white miners and settlers on the Native population. As early as 1872, Felix Brunot, the chairman of the Board of Indian Commissioners, proposed federal legislation that would have placed Alaska Natives under the charge of the Bureau of Education within the U.S. Department of the Interior. The Board of Indian Commissioners, which President U.S. Grant had appointed four years earlier in an effort to end hostilities with the Western tribes, urged Congress to attend immediately to the moral and physical welfare of Alaska Natives. Estimates of the Native population of the territory in the early 1870s ranged from William H. Dall's count of 27,664, including 1,421 Creoles or mixed bloods, to the War Department's estimate of 70,000.[1]

The board's recommendations for Alaska reveal its assimilationist leanings. While Secretary of the Interior Columbus Delano was reluctant to take on the financial obligation of extending services to more Indians, Brunot reminded him that any delay in starting the job of civilizing Alaska Natives would only result in further demoralization and expense in the long-run. The bill, as the Board of Indian Commissioners proposed it to Congress, spelled out the government's obligation to educate and Christianize the inhabitants of its northern possession. It stated that all instruction would be conducted in the English language by "competent Christian teachers."[2]

First American Missionaries

American Christian missionaries had been active in the area since 1877, when Sheldon Jackson, who had been a Presbyterian missionary in the Rocky Mountain West for nineteen years, made an exploratory trip north. Accompanying him was Mrs. A.R. McFarland, who established a church and school in Wrangell. According to the minutes of the first meeting of the Presbytery of Alaska, on Sept. 15, 1884, Mrs. McFarland opened the Wrangell school on Aug. 28, 1877, with thirty pupils.[3] The next year marked the arrivals of Presbyterians John G. Brady and S. Hall Young. Brady went on to receive an appointment as federal commissioner in Sitka, and he later served nine years as Alaska territorial governor. Along with Jackson, McFarland, and S. Hall Young, Brady worked quickly in the years before the Organic Act to expand the work of the Presbyterians to other parts of Southeastern Alaska. With the financial and spiritual support of the church's Board of Home Missions, they established themselves in 1881 at Dtehshuh (renamed Haines some time before 1884) and the village Howkan, which the missionaries called Jackson, near the southern end of the Alaska Panhandle. In the minutes for the first meeting of the Presbytery of Alaska is a listing of all the church members involved in missionary work in Alaska by 1884. It included Sheldon Jackson as Presbyterial Missionary; a minister and a teacher in Wrangell; a minister and two teachers in Haines; a minister and two teachers in Jackson; and a minister and six teachers in Sitka.[4]

Jackson himself was most proud of the Sitka school. It opened in 1878 with John Brady and Fannie Kellogg as teachers. Later that year Kellogg married S. Hall Young and moved with him to Wrangell. Jackson reported to federal Commissioner of Education John Eaton that eighty students arrived for school the first year. The Natives were all most eager to receive American education and religion, he said, and the government should not deny them those opportunities. Jackson told of one Native who, after traveling a great distance by canoe to attend the school, told the teacher, "You come and teach all the Stickeens, and all the Hydalis, and Tongas about God. Nobody come and teach my people. My people all dark heart."[5]

To increase and maintain attendance, however, the Presbyterians relied on military law enforced by the U.S. Navy. At a meeting of the Bureau of Education in Washington, D.C. in 1882, Jackson reported that a Navy captain had established a rule compelling Indian children in Sitka to attend school. The captain first numbered all the Indian houses and then took an accurate census. Then, according to Jackson's report, he "caused a label to be made of tin for each child, which was tied around the neck of the child, with his or her number and the number of the house on it." Indian children found on the street during the day were reported to the teacher. Finally, Jackson said, "If the child was willfully absent, the head man was fined or imprisoned. A few cases of fine were sufficient. As soon as they found the captain in earnest, the children were all in school."[6]

As Congress failed to act on behalf of Alaska, Sheldon Jackson increased his pleas for enforcement of civil law and for a system of education for the Natives. His letter to the U.S. Commissioner of Education in 1878 portrayed Alaska Natives as intelligent people who were easily corrupted by immoral white men. After a visit to the community of Wrangell, he wrote, "On every hand were raving drunkards and groaning victims."[7] To him, the best hope for instilling the values of civilized life was a solid Christian education. He told of female students who had succeeded in the Presbyterian mission school in Sitka. "As a girl made progress in the school it manifested itself in her outward deportment and personal appearance," he wrote. "Intelligence lightened up her countenance in the place of the former dull stolidity."[8] He went on to say that if the American people knew about the deplorable conditions in Alaska, they would not deny the Natives the opportunity to receive an education.

Jackson's philosophy of Indian education was guided by the same principles espoused by Richard H. Pratt, founder of the Carlisle Indian school in Pennsylvania. In fact the industrial training program at Carlisle and other boarding schools for American Indians was Jackson's model for a Native education system in Alaska. In a letter to Commissioner of Indian Affairs Hiram Price in 1883, Jackson cited the success at Carlisle and proposed to build the same kind of school in Sitka. In his work *Reading, Writing and Reindeer,* Victor Henningson wrote that in order to achieve Jackson's goal of "complete cultural substitution," the Sitka

Industrial School became in effect an Alaskan Carlisle.[9] Jackson said that Americans would be ashamed if it became generally known that, in the area of education, Alaska Natives were worse off under the control of the United States than they had been under Russian rule. In his mind, the taming of the Indians could be accomplished far more efficiently in the classroom than it could on the battlefield. "By commencing with the native population of Alaska, before they become complicated by the encroachments of the incoming whites, and giving the children educational advantages, you will prevent a new crop of costly bloody and cruel Indian wars."[10]

Civil Government for Alaska

With the Organic Act of 1884, Congress acknowledged that some form of local civilian government was needed to establish order, civility, and Christian morals in Alaska. Then, just a few months later, on March 2, 1885, Congress assigned responsibility for the education of Alaska Native children to the U.S. Commissioner of Education in the Department of the Interior, and on April 10 of the same year, Sheldon Jackson was appointed General Agent of Education for Alaska. Jackson's philosophy was a perfect match with federal policies calling for civilization and assimilation of Native Americans through suppression of their language and culture.

By the time of the Organic Act of 1884, Episcopalian and Jesuit missionaries had already been at work along different parts of the Yukon River, and the Russian Orthodox Church had been a major religious presence for nearly a century from Attu to Sitka. But the Presbyterians, more than any other Protestant missionary group, recognized that if they were to dominate the religious life of Alaska Natives, they would have to work through the channels of government. From early on, Presbyterian leaders succeeded in securing appointments of their own people to the key federal positions in the Alaska territory. While other missionary societies merely tended to the job of saving souls, the Presbyterians took the needed political initiative. They gained the support of policy-makers in Washington, D.C., and thus had a stronger influence than any other religious group in the future of Alaska Native language and culture. Alaska Territorial Governor John H. Kinkead wrote in 1884 that the Presbyterians were doing "much good in the effort to Christianize, enlighten and educate the natives," adding that the work of these missionaries should be "substantially encouraged" by the federal government.[11]

In 1887, U.S. Commissioner of Education Nathaniel H.R. Dawson made it clear that the government intended to extend its rapid assimilation policy to Alaska Natives and that the teaching of English remained a fundamental part of that effort. Through schooling, he wrote, Alaska Natives would learn to appreciate their new privileges and obligations as U.S. citizens. "They are to be taught to speak, read,

and write English, the purpose of the Government being to educate them in our customs, methods, and language."[12]

The attitudes of the various missionary groups toward native languages, however, were not so clearcut and simplistic. Even the Presbyterians, who in Alaska were mostly united with the federal government, were ambivalent, if not deeply divided, over the issue when seen in the nationwide context. Some missionaries within that church believed that both religious and secular education was achieved best in the language that children could understand. Jesuit, Episcopalian, and Moravian missionaries in Alaska worked, although with limited success, for the next eighty years to produce educational and religious materials in Alaska Native languages.

The government was concerned with promoting patriotism, fostering nationalism through cultural unity, and teaching the skills Native Americans would need in order to find jobs and opportunities in the modern economy. In the 1880s, those goals required a common language and religion as well as a core set of standards and moral values, and teachers employed by the federal often approached their jobs with a missionary spirit. At the same time, the purpose of most missionary groups was religious conversion coupled with humanitarian efforts to improve health care and educational opportunities, and provide the Natives with an escape from the devastating influences of alcohol.

These motives resulted in a cooperative effort between government and the churches. The most outspoken of missionaries in Alaska moved quickly after the Organic Act to arrange a contract system through which the government provided funds to various religious organizations to subsidize their missionary work. It was practical symbiosis, with each entity enabling the other to do its job. Government supplied the money and in turn was supported in its efforts to expand the influence of education; missionaries supplied the religion and received government funds to further expand their work. The relationship was so mutually beneficial that a philosophical difference between government and some of the missionary groups over the value of native languages never became a major issue.

Both personally and as General Agent for Education in Alaska, Sheldon Jackson supported the government's position of allowing only the English language to be used in federal schools, and he enforced that policy wherever possible. He also knew, however, that missionaries of all denominations were valuable to the government's purpose and that it would be useless to oppose the ones who were pro-language on a matter that they felt so strongly about. His urgent need to supply Christian missionaries to the Alaska territory's widely scattered villages did not allow him to disqualify any missionaries who were willing to serve even though some held an opposing opinion on the value of native languages. Moreover, Jackson had no power to influence the inner workings of Moravian, Catholic, or Episcopalian religious life. He could only work to direct the classroom

activities within the schools subsidized by government funds. Instead Jackson concentrated on working through the Washington bureaucracy to assure continued Congressional support for the education of Alaska Natives.

Part of the strategy was portraying Alaska Natives as different morally, intellectually, and culturally from the Indians of the American West. Alaska Territorial Governor Alfred P. Swineford insisted that the northern Natives were explicitly "not Indians" and that every characteristic marked them as "a race wholly different and distinct from the Indian tribes inhabiting other portions of the United States."[13] With the Organic Act of 1884, Congress appropriated $25,000 to the Department of the Interior for education in Alaska. That responsibility was initially assigned to the Office of Indian Affairs but a year later, with Jackson's appointment, the secretary of the interior transferred it to the Bureau of Education. The efforts of Swineford and Jackson must have had their desired effect. From then on, Alaska Natives were treated differently than all other American Indians. Because Congress perceived Alaska Natives as more hospitable to the influences of American civilization and more eager to receive the benefits of education than other American Indians, it removed the administration of their schools from the Bureau of Indian Affairs and placed it within the Bureau of Education.

Thus Alaska Natives signed no treaties, received no reservation lands, and were not "conquered by Euro-Americans."[14] While tribes in the contiguous United States dealt with agents assigned by the commissioner of Indian Affairs, Alaska

Natives' contact with the federal government was through teachers and missionaries employed by the Bureau of Education. There was no Indian agency in Alaska and therefore, as legal analyst David Case pointed out in his study of Alaska Natives and the law, the Department of the Interior initially was able to assert that Alaska Natives did not have the same relationship with the federal government as other Native Americans, and their sovereign authority was placed into question.[15]

In 1887, Secretary of the Interior L.Q.C. Lamar issued his "Rules and Regulations for the Conduct of Public Schools and Education in the Territory of Alaska." Those rules established a Territorial Board of Education and gave it the authority to "prescribe the series of textbooks to be used in the public schools and to require all teaching to be done in the English language." Article III, Sec. 6 of the same document specified that

> The children shall be taught in the English language, and the use of school books printed in any foreign language will not be allowed. The purpose of the Government is to make citizens of these people by educating them in our customs, methods, and language. The children are primarily to be taught to speak, read, and write the English language.[16]

Not surprisingly, the first of the Christian missionary societies to receive federal government subsidies for the education of Native children in Alaska was the Board of Home Missions of the Presbyterian Church, which accepted government funds to run schools in Sitka, Wrangell, Haines, and Hoonah. The federal Bureau of Education soon awarded similar contracts to Moravians, Roman Catholics, Baptists, Methodists, and Episcopalians in various parts of the territory.

A standard form letter written for teachers hired for Alaska schools reveals the depth of Jackson's belief in the value of an English-only education. He approached the job of teaching Alaska Natives with the spirit of a Christian missionary, and he expected the same from the teachers in his charge.

> It is the purpose of the government in establishing schools in Alaska to train up English speaking American citizens. You will therefore teach in English and give special prominence to instruction in the English language. When the pupils have made sufficient progress in the English language you are expected to give special instruction in civil government and the duties and privileges of citizenship.

Later in the same letter, he wrote that while government schools are non-sectarian and must avoid specific religious instruction, Christian morals must still apply. "As morality and godliness are the foundations of good citizenship, and are

so held by Protestants, Roman and Greek churches alike, your teaching should be pervaded with the spirit of the Bible — a training of the heart and moral faculties as well as the mind and body."[17]

U.S. Commissioner of Education Nathaniel H.R. Dawson shared Jackson's philosophy of Native education. He wrote of the connection between intelligence and American citizenship, saying that all Native Americans "shall be prepared by education to appreciate and enjoy their new privileges and to understand their new obligations and political relations. Especially is this true of the people of Alaska." Dawson was encouraged by efforts that the schools had already made in that direction. "Many of the natives speak English," he wrote, "and some are fairly educated in the elementary branches and seem anxious to adopt the manners and customs of the white man. . . . Many have abandoned the savage practices of their ancestors and have been brought under the humane teachings and influences of Christianity." He quoted Territorial Governor Swineford who observed that "they yield readily to civilizing influences and can, with much less care than has been bestowed upon native tribes elsewhere, be educated up to the standards of good and intelligent citizenship."[18] Author Hugh Brody has suggested that these characterizations of Alaska Natives near the end of the nineteenth century conform to typical stereotypes that Americans and Europeans held at the time: the smiling, compliant, eternally happy Eskimo in the North versus the cunning, warlike Indian

who stood in the way of progress and expansion on the continent. "The one at war with nature," Brody wrote, "the other with settlers."[19]

Commissioner Dawson argued, however, that the government's work among Alaska Natives was the same process that it had gone through with other Indian tribes, relying on the education system as a vehicle of assimilation. "It is the repetition of the same story of civilized men coming in contact with races of inferior or partial civilization," he observed. "This state of depravity can only be improved by a thorough moral and intellectual intercourse and association with the better class of American citizens."[20]

Varying Views of Language

Teachers in government schools reported slow but steady progress in this process of civilization. One teacher from Juneau wrote that some of her students had learned to read and write some English, but that she still faced a tough job ahead. "To the casual observer," she said, "perhaps nothing seems more absurd than to attempt by any process to enlighten the clouded intellect of these benighted people. Indeed, the most squalid street Arabs might be considered a thousand times more desirable as pupils."[21] She concluded, however, by saying that she had become convinced that they could learn.

Where language use was concerned, Presbyterians below the upper leadership level in Alaska exhibited the same ambivalence they had shown in their missions in

the contiguous United States. Jackson's himself left no doubt about his own preference. Writing in the Presbyterian newsletter *The North Star* in 1888, he promised that no books in any Indian languages would be used in Presbyterian schools and that no instruction would be given in any native language. He continued,

> Instruction in their vernacular is not only of no use to them but is detrimental to their speedy education and civilization. It is now two years and more since the use of the Indian dialects were first prohibited in the training school here (Sitka). All instruction is given in English. Pupils are required to speak and write English exclusively, and the results are tenfold more satisfactory than when they were permitted to converse in unknown tongues.[22]

S. Hall Young was just as determined as Jackson to destroy the aboriginal languages and transform Native Alaskans into a population of monolingual speakers of English. In his autobiography published in 1927, he wrote of those early years in Sitka and of his perception of the native languages as inadequate and uncivilized in comparison to English.

> One strong stand, which so far as I know I was the first to take, was the determination to do no translating into the Thlingit language or any other of the native dialects of that region. When I learned the inadequacy of these languages to express Christian thought, and when I realized that the whites were coming; that schools would come; that the task of making an English-speaking race of these natives was much easier than the task of making a civilized and Christian language out of the Thlingit, Hyda, and Tsimpshean; I wrote to the mission Board that the duty to which they had assigned me of translating the Bible into Thlingit and of making a dictionary and grammar of that tongue was a useless and even harmful task; that we should let the old tongues with their superstition and sin die—the sooner the better—and replace these languages with that of Christian civilization, and compel the natives in all our schools to talk English and English only. Thus we would soon have an intelligent people who would be qualified to be Christian citizens.[23]

Young's statement acknowledged the disagreement within the Presbyterian community over the language issue. In claiming to be the first missionary he knew of to take such a strong stand against the use of native languages, and by refusing to carry out the translating duties that had been assigned to him by the mission

board, he recognized that some within the church favored using the native languages for religious and secular education. Carrie and Eugene Willard, for example, were contemporaries of Young and served the Presbyterian missions in Wrangell and Haines beginning in 1881. In letters written to her family, friends, and colleagues over a two-year period Carrie referred to her efforts to learn Tlingit vocabulary and use the language in both religious and classroom settings. Soon after arriving in Haines she wrote that she and her husband were "anxious to learn the language, for there is much we long to say which we cannot get others to say for us."[24] They did not share Young's view that the Tlingit language was inadequate for expressing Christian thought. "We had the children recite their catechism and about twenty verses of Scripture in both English and Tlingit, blending these with singing and prayer in both languages, and another sermon," she wrote. "Mr. Willard teaches English, and the whole congregation repeats the Lord's Prayer in concert every Sabbath in Tlingit."[25]

Another Presbyterian missionary couple who did not share Young's opinion of the uselessness of native languages was James Wollaston Kirk and his wife Anna, who served at Eagle on the upper Yukon River for four years beginning in 1899. The Kirks credited the Episcopalian missionaries who had preceded them in the area for their "grand work" in teaching the Natives to read their own language and translating the Bible, prayers and hymns into Athabaskan. Anna described a worship service conducted in the native language as an "object lesson" that she

would not forget. "For once," she said, "I was worshipping in an unknown tongue with people whose customs are so different from our own, yet it seemed easy to interpret the preacher's tones and gestures."

James Kirk described a Sunday Episcopalian worship service conducted in the native language by saying that it was "a great pleasure to see the devout and reverent conduct of that people and the way in which they followed the service." That same evening, he said, "three babes were baptized, and last of all a young couple came forward and were married. All of this was in the native language and the last two services were lengthy."[26]

For Presbyterians in general, the long-term process of civilizing the Natives required that tribal people give up all aspects of their culture. Native languages were definitely seen as a part of that culture, but on the question of using those languages in education, the church remained divided. While Jackson and Young never wavered from their strong stand, official church policy was not so strident, and some missionaries continued to see the language as the best immediate means for transmitting their message to the native people. The Presbyterian Department of Missionary Education advised teachers and ministers to be sensitive to the reasons that Indian children were slow to pick up the English language and to be careful not to embarrass those students. Thomas Moffett of that board wrote, "If you have not learned his language in which to converse with him, neither does he care to learn yours or to put himself in the position to be laughed at by you for his

blunders."[27] Moffett said that the native languages were valuable for enabling Indians to express their vivid imaginations, especially since most tribes had no system of writing. But even though he expressed sensitivity to the language issue, Moffett stopped far short of advocating the use of religious or school materials in the native languages. In fact, he reported that teaching in the Presbyterian mission schools "is exclusively in English, and in many the use of the Indian tongues is prohibited."[28]

Presbyterians could all agree that English was the language of the future for American Indians, but some prominent members continued to insist that the native languages had a place, especially in church liturgy. The Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions Manual for 1873 called knowledge of the native language "an indispensable qualification of missionary service."[29] While some Presbyterian missionaries worked hard to learn the languages of the people they served and to use those languages to teach literacy and Christianity, the long-term goal was to supplant the native languages with English.[30]

The superintendent of one Presbyterian missionary school drew a direct connection between Christianity, the English language, and national prosperity. Referring to a speech he had given to Choctaw students in 1846, he recalled,

> I told them that the people who speak the English language, and who occupied so small a part of the world, were nevertheless the people who

> held the great power of the world, and possessed the greatest part of its wisdom and knowledge; that knowledge they could thus see for themselves was power; and that power was to be obtained by Christianity alone.[31]

Where Sheldon Jackson and S. Hall Young found common ground with the Presbyterian Department of Missionary Education was in their belief in the ultimate value of their work. "Now is the time to go after the Indian and strengthen him by the power of the gospel," Moffett wrote. "The Indian comes with long strides towards you Christian people, with his long hair, and his blanket thrown over his shoulder. He kneels to you as he has never knelt to any other race in all the ages."[32] Presbyterians convinced themselves that Native Americans were eagerly awaiting the missionaries' efforts to raise them out of their primitive conditions and that all had recognized the superiority of the white man's religion and civilization.

So the Presbyterian mission was not just religious conversion. It included cultural assimilation as well, and one was not possible without the other. Accepting mainstream American Christianity required the adoption of all aspects of white American society and culture. It was for that reason that Sheldon Jackson fit so perfectly into the government system. He wanted to do more than merely convey the word of God; he wanted to do the government's job of making Alaska Natives

into patriotic American citizens as well. The Presbyterians expanded their Alaskan missionary work to the Southeastern villages of Hoonah, Klukwan, Saxman, and Klawok. They also established themselves in the far northern village of Barrow and at Gambell on St. Lawrence Island in the Bering Sea.

"Rules and Regulations for the Conduct of Schools and Education in the District of Alaska," published in 1890 and signed by the Commissioner of Education and the Secretary of the Interior, gave the General Agent for Education in Alaska the power "to prescribe the series of textbooks to be used in the public schools and to require all teaching to be done in the English language." The same set of rules directed that "Special efforts shall be put forth to train the pupils in the use of the English language."[33]

Jackson enjoyed reporting on individual successes and in the Sitka school newsletter *The North Star* he often printed articles written by students who praised the learning opportunities available there. "A Day in the Mission at Sitka," written by student Edward Marsden in 1890, presented a picture of a military-style academy where rules of conduct, including a prohibition on the use of native languages in or out of class, were strictly enforced. "A boy who is one minute late loses his meal," Marsden wrote. "The squad is commanded by the sergeants and marches into the dining room, keeping step to the sound and time of music." He explained that "talking Indian is not permitted by the rules, and broken English is everywhere heard."[34] Speaking of his Native classmates, Marsden observed that,

> Ignorance once ruled their minds; forgetfulness possessed their brains; do-as-I-please commanded their heads; carelessness fastened to their hands. ... All these habits and many others are one by one broken off by firm, heavenly, and worldly teachings of the school. ... Do the young men learn these better things in the mines, canneries and on steamships? No, sir, they are taught right here in the school, and the pupils owe a debt of gratitude to the Board of Home Missions and to our teachers and friends who gave their talents and treasures to the establishment of this grand and excellent work.[35]

In 1892, the newsletter quoted Samuel Townsend, who was then attending law school. "I believe in education," he said, "because I believe it will kill the Indian that is in me and leave me the man and citizen. ... I believe in the Indian learning the English language; one people, one language, that is my idea."[36]

Territorial Gov. Lyman E. Knapp praised the missionaries of all churches at work in Alaska for their efforts toward educating the Natives. "Part of the work," he wrote in his annual report to the Secretary of the Interior in 1892, "is teaching them our language, our laws and our customs – in other words preparing them to become worthy citizens of our republic. I do not hesitate to assert that the best

educational work which has yet been done in Alaska has been done through these mission agencies."[37]

The Problem of Russian Orthodoxy

The positive testimony that the missionary/government school system received from the Natives themselves was strong reinforcement for Sheldon Jackson, the Presbyterians, and U.S. government policy-makers. But besides the normal difficulties of introducing Christianity and civilization in Alaska, these forces faced the persistent obstacle of Russian Orthodoxy, which had been a strong presence among coastal Natives since for most of the century. The Russians had allowed aspects of Native culture to survive, had created writing systems for the aboriginal languages, and had encouraged literacy in those languages. To the Protestants arriving in America's new possession, however, the Russian influence was a major roadblock standing in the way of Protestant Christianity and American civilization.

The rules requiring English-only materials in government schools were aimed as much at curbing the considerable influence of Russian in Alaska as they were at any native language. American citizenship in the 1800s required cutting the ties of loyalty to any foreign nation or culture, and federal officials were disturbed by the strong Russian tradition among Alaska Natives.

Russian Orthodox missionaries had produced a significant body of religious material in Alaska Native languages. After the United States purchased Russian America in 1867, however, these literary accomplishments fell off sharply even though the Aleut language continued to be spoken as extensively as ever and the writing system, which had been developed to serve religious purposes, had expanded into everyday secular life as well. Suddenly Russian missionaries found themselves on foreign soil and the main source of financing for the church in America evaporated as the Russian-American Company ceased to exist. The Orthodox Church acted quickly to move its administrative headquarters out of Sitka and to establish the Holy Synod for the United States in San Francisco.[38] In 1870, Innokentii Shaiashnikov, who had served as a missionary in both Atka and Unalaska and had translated much of the New Testament into Aleut, summed up the difficult situation the Orthodox Church faced after the purchase. He said that only four priests were left to serve all of Alaska: two in Sitka, one in Unalaska, and one in Kodiak. Furthermore, he said, non-Orthodox missions had started to move into the territory. The church provided a partial remedy by establishing the Diocese of the Aleutians and Alaska in 1870 and allocating 38,000 rubles a year for the next four years for all its churches. According to Russian Orthodox historian Gregory Afonsky, this meager amount left the church in Alaska in a significantly weakened position.[39]

When Sheldon Jackson and his fellow Presbyterians arrived later in that decade, they were distressed to find so much of the native population already indoctrinated into a religion that did not fit the American Protestant mold. Jackson went to work immediately to discredit the Russian influence. Addressing a meeting of the federal Bureau of Education in Washington, D.C., in 1882, he said that fewer than twenty students attended the schools maintained by the Orthodox Church and that education had been so badly neglected that only four hundred people remained who could read and write either Aleut, Koniag, or Russian. No English was taught, he said, and "among the Eskimos and Indian population, none can read or write except those that during the past four years have attended the schools established by the Presbyterian Church in Southeastern Alaska."[40] His message included a plea for government funding for missionary education in Alaska. That territory, he said, was the only part of the nation where no help was furnished for schools.[41]

By the 1880s, the Orthodox Church in Alaska had rebounded some from its abrupt loss of funding after the U.S. purchase. Annual appropriations from the Holy Synod had nearly doubled from the original 38,000 rubles in 1870 and continued to grow until they reached 90,000 rubles at the turn of the century. The synod, which received its support from the Russian government, kept up this level of funding for Alaska until the 1917 revolution, when the Soviets cut off all support for religion.[42]

Attendance figures provided by the Orthodox Church differ widely from those Jackson reported to the U.S. Bureau of Education. In 1876, the church opened a boarding school in Unalaska, with forty-seven boys and twenty-seven girls attending. By 1882 it had also opened schools in Nushagak and Belkofski. Five years later, the church reported total school attendance of 57 in Sitka; 22 in Kodiak; 15 in Kenai; 8 in Nushagak; 7 in St. Michael; 59 in Unalaska; 30 in Unga; and 25 in Belkofski.[43] In 1902, the church reported that the number of priests in Alaska had grown to seventeen, and that there were forty-five church schools with a total attendance of 760 students. Two of those schools — one at Sitka and one at Unalaska — were specifically focused on training people for service in the church. The curriculum included lessons in Russian and English as well as the native languages.[44]

In 1887 Sheldon Jackson firmly opposed a request by a Russian Orthodox priest to teach Russian in the public school in Sitka. "A prominent purpose of the schools is to teach the English language in order to unify the several languages of Alaska and to better prepare the people for citizenship," he wrote. "This has a bearing on the request of the Russo-Greek priest."[45]

As General Agent, Jackson complained frequently about Russian Orthodoxy. The many religious holidays, he said, were a "serious hindrance" to regular attendance. Meanwhile, the children were taught to pray for the Emperor of Russia even though none had ever heard a prayer said for the President of the United

States. In St. Michael, he said, the priest taught Russian to the children while "through misrepresentation and prejudice [he] kept them away from the Government school." He wrote with obvious disapproval that in Kodiak and Afognak — now legally American possessions — "the people in language, and still more in sympathy and feeling, are Russian."[46]

Clearly, to Jackson, the language one spoke was inseparable from one's political, national, and cultural identity, and the government's success in creating solid American citizens out of the Alaska Native population depended on the Natives' acceptance of the English language. But the rules banning Russian were often hard to follow even for teachers directly under Jackson's supervision. James A. Wirth, who taught in Afognak, told Jackson that no teacher could accomplish anything in that village without the ability to converse in Russian. "As it is," he said, "the people are not only in language but still more in feeling pure Russians, while Americans in their estimation are outside barbarians." He begged Jackson to send him Russian grammars and dictionaries, as well as phrase books, and religious materials in that language. He said that he intended to learn not only Russian but also the native language so that he could converse with students and eventually teach them English. He told Jackson that it was unfortunate that the federal government had not started schools for Native children immediately upon taking possession of Alaska. "If that had been done," he declared, "the younger

generations would by this time be Americanized, and in another twenty years English would have become their language."[47]

In response to Wirth's request for classroom materials printed in Russian, Jackson did nothing. He approved of the teacher's efforts to learn the language, but stuck by his conviction that materials used in the federally subsidized schools should be English only. In his annual report written in 1888, Jackson told his superiors in Washington that James A. Wirth had only two hindrances to his work at Afognak: lack of appreciation among the parents for the value of education, and an overcrowded schoolhouse.[48]

Jackson typically ignored any Orthodox contribution to Native education. He knew that with Alaska's huge geography and scattered villages he would need all the help he could get, not just from the federal government but from missionaries of other Christian denominations as well. In his *Report on Education in Alaska 1886,* prepared for the Bureau of Education, he outlined a cooperative plan in which the Episcopal, Moravian, Methodist, Baptist, Presbyterian, and Congregational churches would work with the government to set up schools around the territory. While he mentioned that Catholic missionaries were interested and might also be considered for government-sponsored missionary work, he specifically did not include the Russian Orthodox Church. Jackson and representatives of the various churches generally agreed that "whenever a

missionary organization has been alone in a large section it has seemed right as far as possible to select teachers from that communion."[49]

Under Jackson and Commissioner of Education Nathaniel H.R. Dawson, the government deliberately set up schools in villages already served by the Orthodox Church. In his annual report for 1887, Jackson complained that instruction in Unalaska was mainly in the Russian language, and that children there were not being properly schooled in the American system. He said,

> American citizens that have never heard a prayer for the President of the United States, or of the Fourth of July, or the name of the capital of the nation, are taught to pray for the Emperor of Russia, celebrate his birthday, and commemorate the victories of ancient Greece. Upon one occasion, trying to inform them that we had come from the seat of government at Washington to open the way for the establishment of schools, we found that the only American city they had ever heard of was San Francisco.[50]

At St. Michael, Jackson found that teaching was also in the Russian language and that the priest of the "Russo-Greek Church" was attempting to keep the children away from the government school. At Afognak, he said, the school was experiencing difficulty because of the Russian influence. He suggested that

members of the Orthodox Church had led the people to believe that the American occupation of Alaska was temporary and that Russia would soon regain possession.[51]

Russian Orthodox clergy responded by firing off attacks of their own against the influence of the U.S. government in Alaska and against Sheldon Jackson personally and professionally. In the pages of their nationwide newsletter published in New York, the church charged that since the transfer of Alaska the Native people were far worse off than they had been under Russian rule because of the demoralizing influences of alcohol and vice brought by American miners and fortune seekers. The Orthodox paper charged that most federal employees were Presbyterian "creatures of the Rev. Sheldon Jackson" and that even as a federal agent of education Jackson's first loyalty was to the Presbyterian Church as a missionary.[52] It contended that federally funded schools had become auxiliaries of the Presbyterian missions. Bishop Nicholas begged President William McKinley to stop the enmity caused by Jackson's presence. "Alaska must be delivered from that man," Bishop Nicholas told the president. "It was the Orthodox Church which brought the light of truth to that country. Why then try to drive her out of it by every means lawful or unlawful?"[53]

The Jesuits

Jackson continually downplayed the role of any Christian organizations other than those that, like the Presbyterians, served the cause of civilization as defined by American Protestants. Certainly, the Russian Orthodox Church fell outside that circle, but the Catholic Church, because it had so many members nationwide, was much harder to exclude. Anti-Catholic feeling in the late nineteenth century was prevalent among citizens who believed that it was impossible to be a patriotic American while owing loyalty — either political or spiritual — to a foreign power such as the Pope. As general agent for education he never acknowledged that the Jesuits had, in fact, been in Alaska for as long as the Presbyterians had.

The first of them traveled north from Victoria, B.C., ten years after the purchase from Russia and explored the Lower Yukon River. They brought along a commitment to linguistic work, and over the next several decades became pioneers in the study and documentation of the Central Yup'ik and Koyukon languages. Jesuit missionaries have a well-earned reputation for scholarship and a particular interest in language and history. As students of the three classic languages of Hebrew, Greek, and especially Latin, Jesuits generally bore no chauvinism about any language. Whether they were native speakers of French, English, Italian, or another European language, they believed that God's truth could be expressed through any medium. They believed in universals, which allowed people to communicate that truth no matter what language they used,[54] and they did not

agree with those who insisted that patriotic Americans must be monolingual speakers of English. The Jesuits' mission in America was salvation of the Natives through dissemination of the word of God, and for any individual missionary the first step toward that end was to learn the native language of the people he wished to save. Father John Seghers was the first Jesuit to enter Alaska after the purchase when he made an exploratory trip to St. Michael and Kaltag, and then spent the winter of 1877-78 in Nulato. While he gathered information about geography and climate, he was most interested in the native population and languages. The author of one undated historical record in the Oregon Province Archives of the Society of Jesus wrote that "only a saint could make the progress in scholarship which the great Archbishop Seghers attained. The gift of tongues seemed his in some mysterious way."[55]

Seghers went back to his base in Victoria but returned to Alaska in 1886 with Aloysius Robaut and Paschal Tosi. He helped found the missions at Nulato and Holy Cross, and then, in a bizarre incident later that year, was murdered by a helper who had gone insane. The writer of the unsigned historical record cited above said that Seghers had a "wish to spend himself for the conversion of the Eskimos and Indians of Alaska. With unbelievable facility he learned languages and dialects."[56]

The first linguistic work of lasting significance belongs to Father Francis Barnum who arrived at Tununak in 1891. In fact, Jesuit historian Louis Renner,

S.J. observed in 1978 that the entire history of Jesuit work in the Eskimo languages of Alaska began with him. Barnum started immediately studying and documenting Central Yup'ik, and in 1901 published his *Grammatical Fundamentals of the Innuit Language, as spoken by the Eskimos of the West Coast of Alaska.* Barnum accepted the job of learning the language as part of the plan for bringing the word of God to the Eskimos. Like other Jesuits to follow him in Alaska, he wrote frequently of the difficulty, plain drudgery, and ultimate frustration involved in mastering the language.[57]

To further complicate the issue, even the Jesuits themselves did not agree on how best to write and learn the language. Jesuit missionary Francis Menager, who served in northwestern Alaska from 1927 to 1953 and published his memoir *The Kingdom of the Seal* in 1962, praised Barnum's linguistic work. He quoted one linguist from the Smithsonian Institution who called Barnum's grammar "the most complete to date on the Eskimo language," and another from Denmark who said it was the most valuable contribution to Eskimo linguistics outside Greenland.[58] Fellow Jesuit Aloysius Robaut, however, was not satisfied with Barnum's treatment of Yup'ik vowels, and he devised his own system. Barnum evidently did not receive such criticism lightly and took consolation in the high praise he had received from Eskimo language experts in Denmark. "If Father Robaut etc. do not like the English style of vowels there is nothing to prevent them from writing a grammar according to their own reactions," Barnum wrote. "This is a free country

and if a man has no shoes he can go barefoot. ... The Danes do not complain of it not being according to the Latin pronunciation."[59]

Episcopalians

Moving up the Yukon River into the interior, the Jesuits encountered a missionary group with an equally long history of service in Alaska and a strong commitment to native language education as well. The Episcopalians' first contact with Alaska Natives was at Fort Yukon, which was established when Hudson's Bay Company trappers crossed the border from Canada in 1847. Robert MacDonald arrived at Fort Yukon in 1862 and he, as much as anyone, is responsible for establishing the Episcopal Church as the center of religious faith among the Gwich'in of northeastern Alaska. MacDonald was determined to teach the Natives to read and write in their own language. After years of work, he developed a writing system for Gwich'in and translated the entire Bible, a Book of Common Prayer, a Catechism, and a hymnal into that language, and in 1911, two years before his death, he published a grammar. Ethnographer Craig Mishler, who has done extensive work with Gwich'in folklore, concluded that the Episcopalians' dedication to language work was a major reason for the continuing allegiance of the Native people to that church.[60]

The Episcopalians expanded further in 1887 when, on the invitation of Sheldon Jackson, they traveled three hundred miles up the Yukon and established a

permanent base at Anvik. Missionary John Chapman arrived in July of that year, and over the next half century he dedicated himself to the study of Ingalik language and folklore. Beginning immediately, he wrote down stories told by the elders of the area, and in 1914 the American Ethnological Society published forty-four of them in a collection entitled *Ten'a Texts and Tales from Anvik, Alaska*. In his memoir of life in Anvik, *A Camp on the Yukon*, published in 1948, Chapman wrote of his respect for Native language and culture, saying "no one who desires to become acquainted with a native language and with native habits of thought can afford to neglect native folklore." He added, however, that stories collected and then transcribed to paper have one major defect. "They can never give an adequate idea of the wealth of native idiom employed by a good storyteller, or the variety of his intonations and the gusto with which he practices his art."[61]

In the early days of their missions on both the upper and lower Yukon, the Episcopalians felt constant competition from their closest missionary neighbor, the Catholics. In Fort Yukon, the Oblate order of the Roman Catholics tried to push the Episcopalians out but failed mainly, Mishler concluded, because the Protestant-based Hudson's Bay Company supported the Episcopalians. The Oblates were accomplished linguists as well, but from the beginning the Episcopalians worked to train Native people as lay ministers and lay readers in their own language.[62] On the Lower Yukon, Chapman first encountered Jesuits in 1888. Holy Cross lies only forty miles downriver from Anvik, and Chapman noted that at first "relations were

strained" but then improved slightly.[63] In 1905, however, Episcopalian Hudson Stuck visited Anvik and wrote of the "unscrupulous competition" with the mission at Holy Cross. When Chapman himself complained of the Jesuits' recruiting trips to Anvik, one priest reportedly remarked that "we are not leading people to perdition, and you are; and that makes a great difference."[64]

Despite deep philosophical differences over the use of native languages, the Episcopalians continued to work closely with Sheldon Jackson and the federal Bureau of Education. Chapman made his position clear and, interestingly, Jackson printed the Episcopalian missionary's views on language in his newsletter *The North Star.* In an article for that paper in 1889, Chapman wrote that the children at Anvik were starting to pick up a little English and were, in turn, a great service to him in learning Ingalik. "We have taught them to analyze words phonetically," he reported, "and when we want Indian words we can get them pronounced for us in a scientific manner. I can now acquire words and phrases faster than I can memorize them, and every month I can see a decided step in advance in speaking the language."[65] Although Chapman was directly opposed to government directives to teach only in the English language, there is no indication that he was ever specifically ordered to change his practice.

By the first years of the twentieth century the Episcopal Church had expanded its reach into other interior villages, including Allakaket, Circle, Eagle, Nenana,

and Tanana. Additionally, it opened a mission at Point Hope to serve the Inupiaq people in the far northwestern comer of the territory.

Moravians

To Sheldon Jackson, the language issue was secondary in importance to the goal of placing an ever increasing number of Protestant missionaries in the Alaskan field. If a group was willing to go and to endure the hardships of climate and isolation, he was willing to accept their linguistic interests. He never compromised his own stand against the native languages, but neither did he disqualify any Protestant group from service in Alaska based solely on a difference of opinion on the English-only issue. He specifically sought out the Moravians, for example, even though they, like the Catholics and Episcopalians, had long believed in the value of teaching in the native languages. According to Moravian records, Jackson's first appeal to them was in August, 1883, nearly two years before his appointment as general agent for education. One Moravian writer observed that Jackson actively recruited that church for work in Alaska because he considered the Moravians to be "especially fitted for this much-needed work, in view of the long experience of the Moravian missionaries in evangelizing tribes of degraded savages."[66]

The Moravian Society for Propagating the Gospel Among the Heathen, based in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, responded immediately by sending two of its

members, Adolphus Hartmann and William Weinland, to explore southwestern Alaska. They arrived at the mouth of the Kuskokwim River in June, 1884, decided on a suitable mission site seventy-five miles upriver, and then returned home to Pennsylvania in the fall to report their findings.[67] In response, the church made a commitment to establish a mission on the Kuskokwim, and in the spring of 1885 Weinland returned to Alaska with a party of four others, including his wife Caroline, John Kilbuck and his wife Edith, and Hans Torgersen.[68]

The Moravians showed an immediate interest in the language spoken by the Eskimos of Southwestern Alaska. Stopping in Togiak on the way to the Kuskokwim in 1884, Hartmann had tried to gain at least a passing acquaintance with some vocabulary. He wrote that several people "willingly repeated the words over and over till I could catch them properly, and I managed to learn the names of the different parts of the body."[69] This interest in linguistics was part of a long tradition in Moravian missionary work. The church got its start in the 1400s in Central Europe, and by the early 1700s it had begun missionary work in Africa and Greenland. A church history written by two Moravians, James Henkelman and Kurt Vitt, described their missionary purposes as reaching people who had never before heard the message of the gospel and teaching them about the true savior. In order to serve native peoples appropriately, Henkelman and Vitt noted, "they were willing, as much as possible, to become Natives, especially as far as language, clothing, and food were concerned."[70] But Moravian missionaries knew that

religious conversion was a long, slow, and difficult process. As Hamilton observed about Weinland and Kilbuck and the other members of that first missionary party in 1885, "It takes years to break the ground, to acquire the language, to translate the Scriptures, establish schools, and to get the good seed sown into the minds and hearts of the people."[71]

This strategy of patience coupled with a sensitivity to language points out a general difference between the Moravians who missionized southwestern Alaska and those Protestants who represented federal government policy in the late nineteenth century. As both a Presbyterian and an agent of the government, Jackson believed that assimilation could be accomplished nearly overnight and that American civilization could be instilled by destroying all signs of native life. Moravians, on the other hand, were willing to work more slowly and believed that the future would bring steady although not instantaneous progress. According to anthropologist Ann Fienup-Riordan, Moravian missionaries were like other Protestants in that "First and foremost, they came to baptize and Christianize; however, they believed this to be neither practicable, nor even possible, unless the people among whom they worked could be 'civilized' as well. ... Yup'ik people were equal in God's eyes and worthy of salvation, but Yup'ik beliefs were inferior."[72]

Moravians saw conversion as a lengthy complicated process that included laborious study of the native language and teaching the people to accept the

benefits of education, Christianity and cleanliness over what Edith Kilbuck called "ignorance, superstition, and dirt."[73] While they tried to destroy shamanism, dance, and the use of masks as elements of a non-Christian religion, they worked to train Natives to be pastors, lay workers, and missionary helpers who could then spread the message to their own people. In contrast to Jackson and the federal government, Moravians relied on the Natives to participate in their own reform rather than forcing it on them from above. Fienup-Riordan explained that they "did not see themselves as doing something for the people as much as inspiring the people to do something for themselves."[74]

The Moravians established a mission on the Kuskokwim in the summer of 1885 and named it Bethel. John Kilbuck, a Delaware Indian who had been trained in the ministry of the church, arrived with high expectations of learning the language of the people and being able to communicate his spiritual message within a short time. At first he thought that fluency in his own native language would help him with the Eskimo tongue. Within weeks of his arrival at Bethel he noted that "seeing that the vocalization of the Eskimo and the Delaware is so very similar, I, personally, do not anticipate very much trouble in learning to speak their language. Whether I shall be so fortunate in grasping their way of thinking and the mode of expressing their thoughts, I really can not tell."[75]

That first winter the missionaries struggled at the job together. John Kilbuck described the process:

> The entire party settled down to learn the native language. The evenings were spent in comparing the words each one had learned during the day, and in exchanging words. Each one kept a list of all the words the entire party had gathered. Every morning each began the day with the same number of words as the others, to which was added every new word that was particularly noticed that day.[76]

Two years later, in 1887, John's wife Edith wrote in her personal journal of the hard work and frustration the missionaries had gone through since then.

> Sometimes we think we know a good deal of their language, but when we come to explain the love of Jesus Christ, what we do know seems as nothing, and we find it impossible to make them understand us as we should. When, O when, will our tongues be loosed, that we may teach and preach unhampered by this great barrier! Soon, we hope and pray.[77]

By that same year the Moravians had secured contracts with the federal Bureau of Education to operate schools for Native children not only at Bethel, but also at a site they named Carmel on the Nushagak River. Sheldon Jackson wrote

that Miss Mary Huber that year gave up her job at a school for young ladies in Pennsylvania, moved to Alaska and "gladly gave herself to teaching the low-down Eskimo."[78]

The first Moravian publication on the Yup'ik language appeared in print in 1889. Augustus Schultze, working in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, with fieldnotes supplied by John Kilbuck and others in Alaska, wrote *A Brief Grammar and Vocabulary of the Eskimo Language of Northwestern Alaska.* Schultze relied on his knowledge of the Eskimo languages of Greenland and Labrador to produce this short work meant to get something quickly into the hands of the missionaries. In his annual report for 1889, John Kilbuck wrote that with some progress in speaking the language, the missionaries were beginning to see a breakthrough in all areas of their work with the Natives. Communication in their language was the key, he said, and as a result they were able to direct the people away from the bad influences of the shamans. "We have ... made sufficient progress in the native language so that we are glad for the open door that is now really open for us," he wrote.[79]

Five years later Schultze printed an improved and expanded edition of his work re-titled *Grammar and Vocabulary of the Eskimo Language of North-Western Alaska, Kuskoquim District.* In 1902 the church published a volume of religious material, including liturgy, hymns, and scripture lessons. And also in 1902, John Hinz, the man who wrote what the Moravians consider to be the standard textbook and dictionary of Central Yup'ik until modern times, began his

years of work in Alaska. He served until 1914 and then from 1920-1924. In 1944 the Moravian Press printed his *Grammar and Vocabulary of the Eskimo Language*.[80]

A unique and remarkable figure in the history of missionary language work in Alaska is the Yup'ik man known as Uyaquq, or Helper Neck. Born in about 1870, he was a shaman when the Moravians arrived but soon converted to Christianity, became a lay worker, or helper, in the church and served until his death in 1924. His greatest achievement was the development of a writing system, which he used to transcribe religious material and preach Christian doctrine to the Yup'ik population.[81] Helper Neck's first writing system was a series of pictographs, or simple drawings combined with words to convey a message. Later, however, he devised a phonetic system, and his translations of the Bible and other religious material in his tight, neatly legible handwriting fill several notebooks.

In those first years the Moravians definitely felt the pressure of competition from other Christian organizations nearby. Their main source of irritation was the influence of the Russian Orthodox — or, as Moravian and many other missionaries referred to it, the "Greek" — Church. They blamed Orthodox priests for poor attendance at their schools in both Bethel and Carmel, and Sheldon Jackson was happy to include their complaints in his annual reports to the U.S. Commissioner of Education. The progress of the school at Carmel, Jackson said, had caused the Orthodox priest to forbid children to attend there. And then he again used the

language issue to further portray the Russian Orthodox as anti-American. "Attempts were also made to frighten the children," he said, "telling them that if they learned English the government would carry them off to San Francisco and make soldiers of them."[82]

The Orthodox tolerance for shamanism offended the Kilbucks, and years later John wrote in an account of the mission's early beginnings that even those Natives who had converted to Orthodoxy were still living close to barbarism. "Spiritually the people were all heathen," he wrote. "Those who had been baptized by the Greek priest were the same as the unbaptized so far as their manner of living was concerned."[83] Edith Kilbuck complained not only about the actions of the Orthodox priest, but about the very basis of their religious beliefs as well, saying, "They are worshipers of the cross rather than worshipers of Christ. ... The whole amounts to the same as the native superstitions." She wrote in her journal in 1894 that John used his newly learned fluency in Yup'ik to make the Natives understand the difference between the evil practices of the Orthodox priests and the positive Christian influence of the Moravian faith. In fact, the Kilbucks saw little difference between Orthodoxy and shamanism. "This John tried to explain," she said, "and if ever he preached a powerful sermon in Eskimo he did it today."[84]

Moravian relations with the Jesuits were not so strained, probably because the latter group concentrated its efforts on the Yukon River and Nelson Island and the two had little contact. Although both the Moravians and the Jesuits served the same

people who spoke the same Eskimo language in Southwestern Alaska, the two missionary societies made no efforts to cooperate in their linguistic studies. Each developed a writing system that was incomprehensible to the other, and neither gave the other any credit for accomplishment. In fact, the Jesuit Francis Barnum charged that "the Moravians have had a bad influence here, and introduced too much German into the native tongue."[85]

Other Protestant Missionaries

While the Moravians progressed on the Kuskokwim, Sheldon Jackson continued to recruit other Protestant missionary groups for work in the territory. In the years between 1885 and 1895, Quaker, Congregationalist, Methodist, Lutheran, Baptist, and Swedish Evangelical missionaries had, with the help of the federal Bureau of Education, established themselves in villages all over Alaska. None of these was as friendly to the native languages as were the Russian Orthodox, Jesuit Catholics, Moravians, or Episcopalians who had preceded them. All were inclined to accept the government's policy of using only the English language in the schools and to carry that policy also into the church setting. The Quakers, for example, moved into Kotzebue in 1887. According to the diary of Martha Hadley, who served in that mission from 1899-1903, some of the early Quakers made an effort to learn the Inupiaq language, but there was no commitment by the mission as a whole to use it as a means of teaching either religious or secular material. Robert

Samms, a Quaker who served at Kotzebue at the same time, apparently knew the language well enough to say a few prayers and interpret parts of the Bible.[86] Martha Hadley, however, made no effort to learn the Inupiaq language and received no encouragement from the church to do so. "Sometimes I wish I could speak the language as easily as the other missionaries," she wrote, "and then again I think it will be best not to learn it for the natives will get the English sooner by being compelled to use the little they know."[87]

The Quaker Church, or Friends, also ran a missionary school in Douglas where Charles Replogle punished children who spoke their native language either inside or outside the classroom with an application of myrrh and capsicum to the mouth. In his book *Among the Indians of Alaska*, published just after the turn of the century, Replogle wrote,

> In order that the children might more the more readily acquire the English language they were expected to speak nothing but English in the home. Of course, this was hard for many of them who knew only two or three words, knowing none at all when they came, and naturally they would among themselves talk Indian. This made their pronunciation of English very bad, and interfered with their construction of sentences; so we required them to speak nothing but English except by permission; but often they would get into the washroom or in the wood shed, and

> having set a watch, they would indulge in a good Indian talk. A few cases of this kind and we applied a heroic remedy to stop it. We obtained a bottle of myrrh and capsicum; myrrh is bitter as gall and capsicum hot like fire. We prepared a little sponge, saturated it with this solution, and everyone that talked Indian had his mouth washed to take away the taint of the Indian language! One application usually was sufficient, but one or two cases had to receive a second application. From that time on, progress in their studies was almost doubly rapid for they dared not talk their own language."[88]

The Methodists set up a school subsidized by government funds in Unalaska, a village already served by the Russian Orthodox. It was a source of optimism to Jackson that since the arrival of the Methodists, the students in the Unalaska school "not only read, write and speak, but seem to do their thinking in English." In an obvious reference to the influence of the Russian Orthodox, he added that the Methodist school was making great progress in civilizing the Natives, and concluded that "this is one of the bright spots in the general darkness and heathenism of western Alaska."[89]

Congregationalists established themselves in Northwestern Alaska in 1890, when William T. Lopp arrived at Wales. Lopp maintained the mission school there for the first twelve years of its existence, and at the time he left he reported that the

Natives had made great strides toward civilization. During his first years, he found the Eskimos to be "as filthy, dishonest, and untrustworthy a people as one could imagine." By 1902, however, he was able to report that the disposition of the people had changed and more than one hundred had become "genuine Christians."[90]

More Federal Control

1895 was a year of drastic change for the Alaska missionary groups that had come to depend on federal funds. Two years earlier, Congress decided to phase out the policy of awarding contracts to Christian missionaries to operate schools for Native Americans. Nationwide, Catholic groups had succeeded in taking the biggest portion of the government's annual appropriation for contract schools, and Protestant Americans were not pleased with the trend. Thomas Jefferson Morgan, a former Commissioner of Indian Affairs and a devout Baptist, was a leader of the strident anti-Catholic movement. He erupted during a meeting of the Board of Indian Commissioners in 1893 while a letter from the director of a Catholic missionary group was being read from the podium. "I do not feel that we are called upon to be called liars and hypocrites," Morgan declared. "If this man wants to make these charges personal, let him come here and make them." Specifically, the Catholic priest who had authored the letter charged that those religious groups advocating an end to the contract system on grounds of a constitutional separation

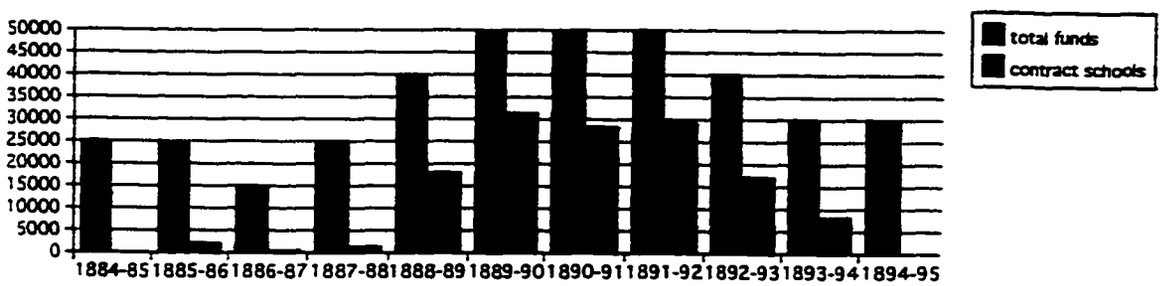
of church and state had, in reality, other motives. The effort, he said, "is a dishonest, hypocritical one, whose sole aim and purpose is to drive the Catholic Church out of the Indian education and missionary field."[91]

Later in the meeting Morgan reiterated his opinions about the need for a strongly American education for Indians, not one that held any loyalty to a foreign power. He said that the "American spirit should pervade our schools," and that separation of church and state was a recognized American idea.[92] By this time, most Protestant groups had voluntarily withdrawn from the government contract system, choosing instead to finance their own missionary activities. This left the Catholics alone to fight for continued federal funding, and without Protestant support the policy was phased out entirely.

Alaskan missionaries were left with an immediate cut in funding. The entire Bureau of Education budget for Native schools in Alaska grew from the initial appropriation of $25,000 in 1884-85 to $40,000 in 1888-89 and $50,000 in 1889-90, 1890-91, and 1891-92. It dropped back to $40,000 in 1892-93, and to $30,000 in 1893-94, and stayed at that level until after the turn of the century.[93] The reduced funding level was coincident with the decision to end of the practice of contracting with missionary groups for the education of Natives. The year of the highest level of funding for missionary contract schools in Alaska was 1889-90, when it reached $31,174. The year 1892-93 reflected the government's decision to

phase out such funding, and total missionary contracts amounted to $17,040. The next year funding fell to $8,000, and in 1894-95 it was stopped completely.[94]

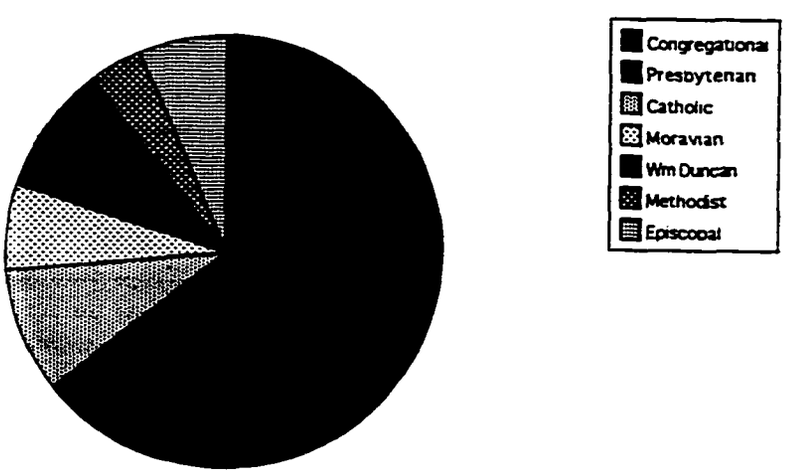
Federal Funding for Alaska Native Education 1884–1895



year	funds for all Native schools	all missionary contracts
1884-85	25,000	0
1885-86	24,562	2,250
1886-87	15,000	300
1887-88	25,000	1,300
1888-89	40,000	18,000
1889-90	50,000	31,174
1890-91	50,000	28,360
1891-92	50,000	28,980
1892-93	40,000	17,040
1893-94	30,000	8,000
1894-95	30,000	0

Federal Funding for Missionary Schools in Alaska for the Year 1889–90

Congregational	1,000
Presbyterian	19,000
Catholic	2,974
Moravian	2,000
Wm Duncan (Metlakatla)	3,000
Methodist	1,200
Episcopal	2,000
TOTAL	31,174



The figures for Alaska were not consistent with the national trend in which Catholic missions took the largest share of the federal pie. Here the winner was by far the Board of Home Missions of the Presbyterian Church. In the year of the highest funding for mission contracts in Alaska, the Presbyterians took $19,000 of the $31,174 total. William Duncan, an independent missionary in Metlakatla, received $3,000, and the rest was divided among the Catholic, Congregational. Moravian, Episcopal, and Methodist churches.

But the withdrawal of federal contracts to Christian missionaries was by no means a switch to secular education for Alaska Natives. Sheldon Jackson was still very much in charge, and he made sure that teachers in government schools under his supervision carried out federal policy with true missionary spirit. In most cases, Christian teachers remained in the same villages and the same schools, and taught the same subjects they always had. The only difference was that now they were employees of the federal Bureau of Education and were thus accountable more directly to that department.

In the last years of the 1890s, Jackson remained most proud of the progress made at the Sitka Industrial School, which he and the Presbyterians had founded twenty years before. He wrote that the children there quickly learned English when they were "strictly prohibited from using their native dialects." English, he said, was the "exclusive language" at the Sitka school, and that experience had removed all doubt about the wisdom of that policy.

> The use of their vernaculars . . . seriously retards their progress and does them no essential benefit. No schoolbooks have ever been printed in any of their native dialects. Each distinct people has a dialect of its own, local in character, and in the course of time the vernacular dialects of the tribes of southeastern Alaska will become obsolete and English will everywhere prevail.[95]

It is impossible to know how closely actual classroom practices across the territory followed federal dictates, but undoubtedly most teachers felt obligated to conduct classes in English. Mary Mack, who taught in the Moravian school in Bethel both before and after the withdrawal of government contract funds, wrote that under the new system of exclusive federal control she felt an urgency to teach in the English language. Even though the children continued to speak Yup'ik among themselves and the missionaries continued efforts to learn it, she started requiring students to use more English in the classroom.[96]

Russian Orthodox educators remained strongly opposed to Jackson and the federal policies he implemented in Alaska. As the nineteenth century came to a close, the long tradition of Orthodox work with Alaska Natives and their languages was under fire, but those who remained committed to that cause were not prepared to give in. The national newsletter *Russian Orthodox American Messenger*

continually charged Jackson with using his position in the federal government to serve his own Presbyterian missionary ends. An editorial reprinted in the newsletter from another paper said, "Why the government should select a tramp preacher to run the affairs of the territory has long been a puzzle to the Alaskans.... He has squandered the public funds to found and support his Presbyterian schools which have failure branded on them."[97]

The Orthodox Church was especially critical of the annual reports Jackson submitted to the U.S. Department of the Interior. In his report for the year 1898-1899, for example, Jackson summarized in detail the work done in Alaska by Presbyterian, Congregational, Methodist, Baptist, Moravian, Episcopal, Friends, and Swedish Evangelical missionaries. But for the Roman Catholic and Russian Orthodox he did nothing beyond a listing of the names of the teachers. The *Messenger* noted that in regard to those latter two missionary groups, Jackson's "silence is significant," and it charged that he was using his position and government money to "hunt down Orthodoxy in Alaska by fair means or foul."[98]

In 1900 the *Messenger* printed an exchange between Right Rev. Tikhon and Sheldon Jackson, clarifying the language issue for both sides. Tikhon explained that teaching both Russian and the native languages was simply a matter of practicality since all religious services were in those languages. Jackson responded with an acknowledgment that it was proper for Orthodox priests to want to train young people in that faith, but he was unrelenting in his opinion that such training

could be done as well in the English language. "Your people in Alaska of course are American subjects," Jackson said. "It seems to me therefore very important that all the young people should be taught and encouraged by their parents and their priests to use the English language both in the family and the playground."[99]

Missionaries and educators at the end of the nineteenth century saw Alaska Natives as a population of people who were equal to white Americans but had not been given the same opportunity to advance to a higher level of civilization. Charles Replogle observed that part of his job was teaching the Indians that their view of themselves as inferior to whites was wrong and that they truly were his equal. With time, he said, they would learn to obey.[100] Like others of his time, Replogle believed in the rightness of the cause of Christianity and American nationalism and that the salvation of the Indians depended on their acceptance of a civilized life and the English language. But teachers also believed that education was Native Americans' salvation from a life of poverty and near-certain extinction as their traditional ways of life were rapidly disappearing with the advance of modern civilization.

The missionary spirit was part of American education. In 1899, Eliphalet Oram Lyte, president of the 10,000-member National Educational Association, addressed the annual convention in Los Angeles by praising "the onward progress of our ever-conquering republic, and the triumphant march of the Anglo-Saxon race." Referring to the nation's responsibility to educate the children of minority

groups, he said the schools were "a great highway on which we can convey the material and spiritual benefits of a Christian civilization to the benighted children of our enforced adoption." Lyte told NEA members that the progress they as teachers had made to "nationalize our country" and to "mold its heterogeneous elements into homogeneity" was so great as to be beyond estimation. "Patriotism is in the air," he stated. "The American youth does not need to be taught to be patriotic, but only how to be patriotic; and this is largely the work of the schools."[101]

At a time when public school teachers' annual earnings nationwide averaged $318 – compared to $379 for coal miners, $543 for railroad workers, and $924 for postal employees[102] – teaching was indeed a calling for those who earned their rewards from the satisfaction they found in helping people and contributing to the common good. By comparison, in 1894 annual salaries in Alaska ranged from $540 paid to a teacher in Sitka to $900 earned by teachers in Kodiak, Unalaska, Unga, Juneau, and Douglas.[103] Regardless of pay, however, teachers generally believed in the spirit as expressed nationally by the NEA and in Alaska by Sheldon Jackson. One NEA member addressing the 1899 annual convention declared that "the restoration of the God-image in the soul of man is the high ideal of the National Educational Association of America. This is the divine mission and calling of teachers of our great country."[104]

Jane Addams, whose *Twenty Years at Hull-House* chronicled a career of working with immigrant families in one of the poorest neighborhoods of Chicago beginning in 1889, represented the idealistic as well as the practical values that inspired many teachers of her time. Her purpose, she said, was to "minister to the deep-seated craving for social intercourse that all men feel." Addams was driven by the hope "that the blessings which we associate with a life of refinement and cultivation can be made universal and must be made universal if they are to be permanent." She recognized knowledge of the English language as a necessary skill in the western economy, citing examples of families that had become dependent on the income their children were able to earn because the children spoke English better than the older generations.[105]

Addams, however, did not share the opinions of those educators who believed that minority groups should necessarily give up all the characteristics of their ethnicity and blend into the American melting pot. She was distressed when she saw children "who repudiated the language and customs of their elders, and counted themselves successful as they were able to ignore the past."[106]

Alaska Natives faced these same issues of assimilation versus perpetuation of tribal traditions as they encountered a rapidly increasing non-Native population in the last years of the nineteenth century. Change was coming whether the Natives liked it or not, and missionaries and teachers were only the most visible representatives of the new society and economy. The forces at work against the

native languages went beyond the schoolroom as the English language was increasingly associated with status, jobs, and wealth. Alaska Natives often were active participants in the process of change, choosing to accept Christianity, the education system and the English language in an effort to help their people adapt to the rapid encroachment of the modern world. As researcher Victoria Wyatt discovered, Natives faced painful choices, and the decisions some of them made to adopt aspects of non-Native society were indications of determined efforts to help their own people in a time of great adversity, not reflections of passivity. She gave examples of three Native women – Sarah Dickinson, Tillie Paul, and Frances Willard – who in the late 1800s learned English, completed their schooling, and became teachers and workers in the Presbyterian missions. Dickinson was a Tsimshian who became the official translator for both Sheldon Jackson and S. Hall Young and worked closely with other missionaries; Paul served as an interpreter and later taught in Presbyterian schools in Klukwan and Wrangell, and then at the Sitka Industrial Training School; Willard was a Tlingit who was educated in New Jersey and also taught at the Stika school. Wyatt's point about all three is that they "felt that this education had benefited them personally ... for each tried to make it possible for other Native people to have the same sort of training. Studying in non-Native schools, adopting a new language, converting to a non-Native religion ... did not cause these women to lose their commitment to their own people."[107]

That teachers and religious leaders were zealous in their efforts to offer job skills and the blessings of western civilization to the Natives is understandable. Their instincts, which told them that the English language was a necessary skill in the political and social reality of modern America, were essentially correct. But in only a few years after the beginning of the new century, activists such as William Duncan and Hudson Stuck outside of government and progressive thinkers within the federal bureaucracy itself recognized the damaging effects of a policy that sought to force an immediate and wholesale substitution of western language and culture for traditional native ways. Michael Krauss has referred to the year 1910, rather than 1900, as a point of major change in the history of Alaska native languages. As of that date, he asserts, most missionary linguistic work stopped, federal schools enforced a policy of "complete suppression" of Alaska Native languages, and the suppression policy proved fatal for most of those languages.[108] Yet Natives made their own choices about their use of language, and those choices were influenced as much by social, economic, and political forces as they were by federal education policy. The beginning of the new century marks a turning point as critics charged that federal efforts need not have been so forceful in promoting total conversion to English, and policy makers acknowledged the failure of past efforts toward forced assimilation. Gradually over time, educators and other agents of the federal government would recognize that it is possible for Alaska Natives to

retain the language of their homes and still participate fully in the American society and economy.

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Chapter 7

Alaska 1900-1960: An Era of Contradictions

While Sheldon Jackson consistently opposed the maintenance of native languages, he represented Alaska Natives as highly intelligent people who were eager to join white society and were hungry for the advantages that could be afforded them through the schools. In his annual reports he frequently cited examples of individual Tlingit, Aleut, or Eskimo children who had left the village, received "a good English education,"[1] and gone on to careers as mechanics, steamer pilots, and missionaries. These examples, he said, could be increased hundreds of times if the Natives' educational opportunities were improved. In the first years of the twentieth century, the government's focus shifted from its efforts to force instant assimilation to an emphasis on manual training that would enable Native Americans nationwide to find jobs and thus reduce their dependence on federal programs. Economics and politics became major factors in the shift from the native languages to English as job opportunities and protection of legal rights for Alaska Natives depended increasingly on the Natives' ability to communicate in the language of the dominant society. The federal education system concentrated

on preparing Native children for the world of work and the responsibilities of citizenship in twentieth century America.

Commissioner of Indian Affairs William A. Jones was the first federal bureaucrat to raise serious questions about the effectiveness of past education policy when in 1901 he charged that off-reservation boarding schools had failed in their efforts to bring the Indians fully and instantly into American civilization. He saw no need to teach mathematics or other advanced academic subjects in Indian schools. To him the goal of Indian education was to train workers and provide Native Americans with opportunities to improve themselves through employment in their own home communities. Jones asserted that education and work in the Indians' own environment would accomplish more long-term good than attempts to force the Indians to join mainstream society. Still, adoption of the English language was fundamental to the Indians' success in the working world, Jones declared. "It will exterminate the Indian, but develop a man."[2]

Insofar as Alaska native languages are concerned, the period from 1900 to 1960 was remarkable for its contradictions, broad swings in federal policy, and differences between administrative intent and actual classroom practice. While some bureaucrats and teachers clung to the conviction that English must totally replace the native languages and worked to expand the dominance of English beyond the schoolhouse to include the entire Native community, others began to accept the idea that minority languages were cultural values that Natives could

retain along with competency in English. Nevertheless, native language suppression continued throughout the period in many Alaska schools, and that pressure, along with the growing prestige of English in the village economy and society, worked to the detriment of every native language in the territory. Teaching English was not the issue. Natives themselves increasingly recognized the advantages of a modern education, and even the critics who protested most vehemently against the traditional federal policies of forced assimilation recognized the need for English in the lives of Native Americans. Contradictions occurred as the federal education system and American society as a whole made no effort to preserve native languages even though many educators recognized their cultural value. Classroom teachers understood and accepted the directive to teach English, but until the 1960s, bilingual education for Native Americans remained a matter of philosophy with no consistently sustained plan and little money for practical application.

When the government withdrew direct funding for missionary schools, it had no intention of also withdrawing the Christian influence from Native education. The Bureau of Education in Alaska was staffed from the top level of administration down to the classroom teachers with personnel who had first served in the territory as missionaries of several denominations. Sheldon Jackson's missionary spirit continued to be the overriding influence in the education of Alaska Natives with personnel he chose for government service. Congregationalist missionary William

T. Lopp, who served the Inupiaq community of Wales for more than twelve years, became superintendent in northern Alaska, and William A. Kelly, a Presbyterian from the school in Sitka, became superintendent for Southeast Alaska. The list of the sixty-two teachers in federally funded public schools across Alaska for the 1904-05 school year included at least twelve who had previously served as missionaries for one church or another.[3]

Official Policy and Classroom Practice

While officially the general agent for education in Alaska continued after 1900 to stress the need for an English-only policy in the schools for Alaska Natives, teaching practices across the territory were neither clear-cut nor consistent. Some teachers followed the directive to the letter while others found a ban on native language use to be impractical or even impossible to comply with. Moreover, some teachers disagreed with the notion that English should completely replace the native languages and believed that Native students and communities could retain both. Federal bureaucrats exhibited inconsistency and ambivalence on the language issue as well. An example is the government's publication in 1904 of a Tlingit grammar and vocabulary intended to help teachers acquire some knowledge of their students' native language. Authors of the work were William A. Kelly, who was the former principal of the Sitka Training School and current superintendent for Southeast Alaska under the Bureau of Education, and Frances

Willard, a Tlingit teacher under Kelly in the Sitka school. Kelly and Willard's linguistic work was published as part of the Commissioner of Education's annual report, and in his introduction to that report Commissioner William T. Harris praised the grammar and vocabulary as being "of great assistance" to teachers in Alaska and "most serviceable to learners."[4]

Harris wrote that Frances Willard had been "rescued while yet an infant from an unpromising future among her own people through the benevolence of the wife of a missionary" and had gone on to acquire "all the refinements of a well-educated young woman."[5] Hers was the kind of life Harris envisioned for all Natives. Speaking to the graduating class of the Carlisle Indian school a few years earlier, he had defined a highly civilized society as one that not only subdued the forces of nature and exploited them for material profit but also shared its knowledge with tribal groups that had not yet reached its level of advancement. He told the Carlisle graduates that

> It must be our great object to improve our institutions until we can bring blessings to lower peoples and set them on a road to rapid progress. We must take in hand their education. We must emancipate them from tribal forms and usages and train them into productive industry. ... As soon as the Indian learns the arts and trades of civilized life he can make his living in the same way that the white

> man does. He can live a life larger than the tribal life because he is able through productive industry to obtain the means by which he may enter into the consciousness of the highest civilization through the book and the daily newspaper.[6]

William Kelly, as a school administrator as well as a Presbyterian, worked under the supervision of both Commissioner Harris and Sheldon Jackson, and therefore was responsible for carrying out the rules forbidding instruction in languages other than English. Still somehow Kelly and Harris – who were educators, not linguists or ethnographers – were able to justify the time and effort spent publishing the Tlingit vocabulary and grammar at government expense for use by teachers. The work is an example of the contradictions inherent in the new era of Indian affairs. Under Commissioner Jones and the administration of President William McKinley, the federal education system emphasized job skills and self-sufficiency for Native Americans in their own communities, rather than instant assimilation. While the necessity of English was unquestioned, some of those involved in Indian schooling believed that native languages should be banned from the classroom in any form, and others subscribed to the idea that the languages were useful teaching tools.

One rather astounding turnabout on the language issue was the case of John Kilbuck, a member of the Moravian missionary party that had established Bethel.

He had worked hard to learn Yup'ik and to follow his church's philosophy of teaching in the language of the local people. Employed in 1905 by the Bureau of Education in Barrow, however, he became a strict enforcer of the policy of compulsory use of English. Kilbuck's teaching partner in Barrow was the Presbyterian Rev. Samuel R. Spriggs who had already served as government teacher there for two years.[7] As both a Presbyterian and a federal employee, Spriggs embraced the idea that the Alaska Natives he taught should replace their ancestral language with English, and apparently his efforts in the classroom had succeeded. The annual report for 1905, written jointly by Kilbuck and Spriggs, concluded that "the main object kept in view was to get the children in the way of using the English they had already learned. The plan for the compulsory use of English in the classroom was introduced and proved to be quite a stimulus to the acquirement and proper use of English words. A failure to conform to the rule was punished by standing. When the rule was first put into force, nearly the entire classroom was on its feet at once." Kilbuck and Spriggs concluded that only through constant drills and enforcement of the English-only rule could "the white man's words be driven home to stay in the Eskimo mind."[8]

Likewise, John Hinz, who worked as hard as any of the dedicated Moravians to learn Yup'ik and use it in the classroom, also acknowledged some concession to the government school policy. In 1908 he wrote that each morning he conducted "a

brief morning prayer service in the English language, as the government demands that they shall learn English."[9]

Jesuit Catholic missionaries during this time continued their laborious study and documentation of the Alaska Native languages with which they came into contact. Jules Jetté, who served the Jesuit mission in Alaska for twenty-eight years beginning in 1899, did extensive and lasting work in the Koyukon language of Nulato. Many of his peers considered him to have been the most scholarly of all the missionaries. One history by a fellow Jesuit reported that he spoke the native language fluently and "made a comparative study of the language and left for posterity notes considered near perfect and penned in a calligraphy absolutely perfect."[10] By 1908, the Jesuits had established a growing presence in Southwestern Alaska, with missions at Nulato, Holy Cross, Akulurak (later named St. Marys), and St. Michael. In that year also, Jetté taught in a school in Kokrines under contract with the federal Bureau of Education.

In 1907, Jackson was replaced by Harlan Updegraff, a man who believed as strongly as his predecessor in the civilizing influences of the school system. Updegraff brought with him the conviction that Alaska Natives should happily accept the opportunities the federal government offered them and that they should be eager to live according to standards set by American civilization. "From this time," he proclaimed on taking office, "the life of the native will be dominated by

the life of civilization. He has come in contact with it, and has willingly surrendered."[11]

Updegraff's plan for education was based on compulsory attendance, a broad and deep appreciation for Christianity, and the acceptance of English as the dominant language. If such measures were not followed, Updegraff decided, the "inferior race" could easily fall so far behind that it would never rise to "higher stages of civilization."[12] He, too, considered Alaska Natives to be distinct from other tribal groups and more open to the influences of education. He suggested that they were "of a different stock from the Indians of the States. Their attitude toward civilization has been friendly and receptive,"[13] and therefore he recommended, as Commissioner of Indian Affairs William Jones had, one significant departure from traditional Indian education. In his opinion, the students should not be taken from their home villages and placed in large industrial schools where they were fully immersed in white society. Such a system, he found, produced students who became dissatisfied with tribal life and could never return successfully to the village. Instead he preferred to allow the children to stay at home and be educated while in contact with their own people so that they could take their place in Native society. Assimilation for Updegraff was a process of teaching Natives to accept white civilization — including language, religion, economy, and lifestyle — while they continued to live in their own communities. Native education was a means of providing the people with skills needed to participate in the modern economy and

thus increase their opportunities for advancement, and Updegraff saw no reason why such education could not occur in local schools.

This switch away from the boarding school concept of Indian education reflected a national trend that took shape as bureaucrats at the highest levels of government looked back on the previous thirty years of federal policy and pronounced it a failure. Efforts to achieve immediate and total assimilation of the Natives into the American population had produced a group of people who in the words of Commissioner Jones "were still largely living on reservations, still prisoners of their tribal outlook, still wards of the Great Father." Jones's successor, Francis Leupp, who was appointed by President Theodore Roosevelt in 1905, is an example of this new generation of critics who could not ignore the poor results of the past three decades. He rejected the idea of immediate assimilation of the Indians into American society, advocating instead a gradual process that would reach the same goal over a long period of time. "Race characteristics which have been transmitted from generation to generation for centuries are not to be uprooted in a day, or a year, or a good many years," Leupp proclaimed. Off-reservation boarding schools, founded in part on the principle of instant conversion and assimilation, soon fell out of favor, and the government instead built up its system of day schools close to the Native children's homes. Even the Carlisle Institute, which Richard Pratt had established in Pennsylvania as the model Indian boarding school, closed its doors in 1918.[14]

Along with such changes was a gradual recognition of the intrinsic value in indigenous languages and customs and what historian David Wallace Adams called "the belief that Native American lifeways, rather than being condemned as universally worthless and thereby deserving of extinction, might serve instead as a fruitful foundation for educational growth." In 1907 Leupp declared,

> I have none of the prejudice which exists in many minds against the perpetuation of Indian music and other arts, customs and traditions. Although I would use every means to encourage the children to learn English, ... I do not consider that their singing their little songs in their native tongue does anybody any harm, and it helps to make easier the perilous and difficult bridge which they are crossing at this stage of their race development.[15]

At the same time, as Alaska Natives' contact with white Americans increased, teachers in government schools began to report easier progress in teaching the English language and more acceptance of English in the villages. A teacher at the Eaton reindeer station on the Seward Peninsula said that the people there had learned English from passing gold prospectors, and from Gambell a teacher reported that the people had learned their English from the crews of whaling vessels. Both complained about the low form of English the children had learned

and reported progress in improving their grammar. Teacher P.H.J. Lerrigo said that he was working to replace the "pigeon English" spoken by the children at Gambell with the more acceptable "grammatical and idiomatic English."[16]

Social, Economic, and Political Factors

Modern health care and housing along with increased Native acceptance of education and Christianity tended to consolidate previously mobile tribes into centralized villages. More and more, as the salmon canning industry, logging, gold mining, and reindeer herding changed the territory's economy, English was the language associated with modern conveniences and material goods. Additionally, Alaska Natives began to understand that English was the language of law and politics in America, and that they would have to know it if they were ever to receive fair treatment as a minority. In 1908 a Haida woman wrote to the U.S. Department of the Interior pleading for laws that would limit the salmon harvest of cannery owners. Her letter was so impressive to Updegraff that he quoted it in his annual report. "Do not take away altogether that which was once our bread and divide the profit among the cannery owners and Government, but give us a mouthful anyway in return so that we can live while in this world."[17]

As modern material goods proliferated in the early 1900s, the incentive for Alaska Natives to adopt the English language became increasingly economic. The Alaska Native Brotherhood was formed in 1912 by Tlingit men who, in

anthropologist Philip Drucker's words, "were accepted as leaders because of their sophistication and ability to cope with white culture, and with white men, on even terms."[18] Most of the ANB founders had attended the Sitka Training School, had become active Presbyterians, and were aware of the skills and training needed to compete in the modern economic and political arenas. Tlingit people took part in the growing commercial salmon fishing and canning industry and, as Drucker wrote, the leaders "knew from firsthand experience the handicaps the Indian labored under in the increasingly higher pressured new economy, and might be expected to favor anything that would smooth the way for themselves, their children, and their heirs."[19] From its earliest days, the Alaska Native Brotherhood stressed the importance of English; the organization's first draft constitution mentioned its value, and conference proceedings were conducted in it.[20]

Federally operated schools were a major factor in the acculturation of Alaska Natives, but it would be wrong to portray the education system as the single force that demanded a wholesale shift to English. Growing economic and political factors changed linguistic habits in the home and in community settings outside the classroom. Anthropologist Frederica de Laguna pointed out in her study of the Tlingits of Angoon that the people themselves are as responsible for their own history as are any of the groups that have influenced them. The "Tlingit character" determined how the changes offered to the people would be adapted to Tlingit culture. "Even today," she wrote, "when that culture is fast losing its aboriginal

coherence, we must not assume that the Indians are passive recipients of foreign teachings. ... They are not only themselves aware of what is going on, but as individuals or groups are taking an active part in hastening, opposing, or directing the changes which affect their lives."[21]

Anchorage lawyer and historian Donald Mitchell asserted in his history of Alaska Natives and their land that it was a "desire for modernity" that more than any other factor persuaded tribal people to adopt the English language and take jobs in the cash economy. "Once they accepted that the whites who began appearing in their neighborhoods were in Alaska to stay, Alaska Natives, like moths attracted to the light, were eager to labor at whatever work whites wanted done in order to acquire manufactured goods that, prior to the arrival of whites, Natives didn't know they needed."[22]

Education for Civilization

Christianity continued to be a major part of the government's plan for educating and civilizing Alaska Natives. In 1910 the Department of the Interior adopted regulations directing pupils in government-run Indian schools to attend church. They were free to choose whatever church they wanted, and "proselytizing" by religious leaders and teachers was forbidden, but two hours a day was set aside for religious instruction and Sunday school attendance was mandatory.[23] In 1911, William T. Lopp, Updegraff's successor as chief of the

Alaska Division of the federal Bureau of Education, declared that educators in the villages had to fulfill duties beyond merely teaching. "They must regard themselves as social workers striving to elevate the native races intellectually, morally, and physically."[24]

Teachers all over the territory reported on their efforts to suppress aspects of tribal culture. E.M. Axelson of Yakutat concentrated heavily on the language, but her biggest worries were the potlatch and dancing ceremonies. "I cannot find words strong enough to condemn this heathenish custom," she wrote in 1912. "The whole village, otherwise fairly civilized, is suddenly transformed into a community of low heathens performing their queer rites in the honor of the dead." She complained that she received no support from parents and that often she had to go to the children's houses and take them to school herself.[25]

Fred Sickler, a teacher at Point Hope complained as well about the lack of support from parents. In annual reports for the years 1911 through 1913, Sickler's main goals were to increase attendance and to stop the use of what he called "pigeon English" and "ship talk" as the Native people had learned it from American whaling crews. He believed that fluency in English was essential to his students' success in geography, math, and other subjects.[26] Judging from his reports and from written evaluations from his supervisor in Nome, Sickler's teaching methods were harsh but effective. He wrote about using the opportunities of community gatherings to "reprove" parents who did not send their children to

school regularly. "I have gone to the native houses and dragged truants to school in spite of the ill-concealed anger of the parents and the tears and protestations of the culprits," Sickler reported. "I found that after the truants found that there was no escape, they came willingly enough, and the parents usually admired me for insisting on the school's rights."[27]

Sickler was one teacher who disagreed with Updegraff's opinion that Alaska Native children should be educated in their own communities. He advocated a system of boarding schools in centralized locations as a way of separating children from the influences of their culture. In his report written after the 1911-1912 school year he referred to the benefits boarding schools would provide in health and nutrition as well as education.

> I have observed that children who are supplied with imported food work better than their less fortunate fellows. I have noticed that at the beginning of school when children are well fed on flour stuffs, fresh meats and fish, they take great interest in their studies, but as soon as they have to fall back on dried fish, seal oil, and similar food, their minds become stale. ... I think that military drill, medical aid, regular meals, regular hours of sleep, freedom from the evils of the one-room community house, and participation in school societies would counteract

the traits in the Eskimo character that prevent them from becoming a successful people.[28]

Sickler's supervisors frequently criticized his methods for teaching English, mainly because he did not follow the government policy banning the use of the native language in the classroom. His goal was the eventual replacement of the Eskimo language with English, and his method was to require students to translate their language into English words and phrases that described village life. He learned much of the Eskimo language himself and tried to teach the students to read for understanding, not just memorization of English words. Often the students would compose sentences in Eskimo and translate them into English. Sickler's supervisor called these methods "decidedly original" and "somewhat surprising," but he did admit that he produced results. All the children understood the English words and thus became good interpreters, the supervisor reported.[29]

Edgar O. Campbell was another teacher who studied the native language spoken by his students and used it in his efforts to teach English and religion. As a Presbyterian missionary hired by Sheldon Jackson for service in a government school on St. Lawrence Island, Campbell wrote a 27-page "primer" consisting mainly of quotations from the Bible in Siberian Yupik. In an unsigned foreword written for a second printing of the book in 1910, the Presbyterian Church referred to the "insistent heartbreaking pleas of the poor islanders for someone to come and

help them," and added that Edgar O. Campbell and his wife were the "human means used by the Holy Spirit to completely change the direction of their lives." Since the language of St. Lawrence Island was the same as that spoken on Siberia's eastern coastline, the church saw reason to hope that Campbell's book "may be used as a mighty evangelizing force among the Kurds in Siberia."[30]

The Campbells' dual roles as religious leaders and educators employed by the federal government were consistent with the missionary spirit Harlan Updegraff and his successor William T. Lopp expected of their teachers. Even though in 1894 Congress had suspended the policy of providing subsidies to Christian missionary societies for running schools for Native Americans, the missionary spirit lived on long after. In 1909, for example, Updegraff, on the recommendation of Paul de Schweinitz of the Moravian Missionary Society in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, hired a Moravian teacher for the school in Quinhagak. The teacher, Anna C. Rehmel, took on the job with a conviction that she must not only teach English to the children in school, but also establish that language as the predominant language of the village. She wrote in 1911 that the children had shown some signs of progress in school, but that she was disappointed in the amount of English they spoke voluntarily outside of school. She held evening sessions twice a week, in which she told the people "frankly and earnestly" to learn to speak English and in which she tried "to wean them from the paganish, superstitious plays in which the natives are still prone to indulge."[31]

The relationship between the federal Bureau of Education and the missionary societies remained as close as the law would allow. Updegraff believed that the advancement of Native people depended on the teaching of Christian values along with modern education conducted in English. In villages that had both a mission and a government school, the teacher often filled a dual role. Quinhagak, for example, had a Moravian mission and a Bureau of Education school staffed by a teacher who was a federal employee as well as a member of the Moravian Missionary Society. Updegraff encouraged cooperation between the missionaries and the government in the maintenance of the schools. Such an arrangement, he told de Schweinitz of the Moravian church, served both entities in their "common work for the advancement of the natives of Alaska." He went on to say that "all over Alaska the missionary societies are receiving valuable assistance from the teachers in the Alaska School Service who consider their primary responsibility to be to the government but who feel that it is their right and duty to aid in a personal way the religious work that is carried out in their midst by one or more of the various missionary societies."[32]

Ironically, this religious work was hindered as much by the influence of lawless white Americans as it was by uncivilized native culture. The white settlers, miners, fishermen, and explorers with whom Alaska Natives came into contact provided no example of the civilized conduct that the missionaries and teachers expected Natives to adopt. When it came to morality, a teacher in Wrangell in 1911

claimed to be "up against it hard," and said that "the whites are a disadvantage in the extreme." She complained about the destructive influence of liquor and about the number of white men who corrupted the morality of Native women.[33] Updegraff recognized the problem as well. As early as 1907 he had written about the Natives' need for "protection from the greed and passion of the unprincipled white man."[34]

A genuine desire to improve the physical and spiritual lives of Alaska Natives was common among missionaries and government teachers of the time. Hannah Breece, whom Sheldon Jackson hired in 1904 and who served in several rural schools for the next fourteen years, wrote that "My job was to bring them benefits now available to them from civilization and from Uncle Sam's care for his less fortunate children."[35] In her personal journal she wrote,

> I have always been careful when working among inferior races to convey to them that I have their interests at heart and love and respect them as a people, but that I do not come among them to sink to their level but to uplift them. ... I am superior to an uneducated native woman and give her to understand that I realize it. She knows it herself. But I want them to realize that I have faith that the ability is within them to improve themselves and their lives and their children's lives.[36]

In terms of language policy, Breece agreed that English was an essential part of the Natives' ability to improve themselves, but apparently she never punished students for using their own languages. On one occasion in Iliamna she arranged for Thanksgiving proclamations from the Governor of Alaska and the President to be translated into the native language.[37]

Influence of the Modern Economy

More frequently as the years passed, educators in the service of the federal government mentioned the Natives' increasing desire to obtain the material goods offered by the white man's economy. The superintendent of schools for the northwestern district wrote in 1913 that "in their advance in civilization they have begun to need the foods of civilization." In the same year he noted a marked improvement in the Natives' use of English both in school and overall in the villages.[38] This connection between modern material goods and the English language was more than coincidence. Flour, sugar, tea, and rice, along with medicine, fabric, and metal utensils were coming into common use among Native people. Access to them was through white Americans, and the language of trade was English.

Educator and anthropologist Patrica Partnow, pointed out in her study of Alutiiq ethnicity that in Alaska Peninsula villages after the turn of the century the

influx of American, Asian, and Scandinavian fishermen and cannery workers had a major impact on the economy of the area, and an increasing number of Alutiiq children grew up monolingual speakers of English as that language became the only common language of the docks and canneries. Families of mixed ancestry "looked toward the English-speaking United States for technology, education, and culture."[39] Parents came to accept the idea that schools did not represent Alutiiq culture but were needed in order to train their children for participation in the modern economy. The Alutiiq language, Partnow concluded, "adds richness, but not riches, to life." It will do nothing to help most children succeed in the world of jobs and finance.[40]

Linguist Patricia Kwachka, in her study of the viability of Alaska native languages, noted that the transition to English usually occurred along with the settlement of centralized year-around villages. Referring particularly to Koyukon people, she stated that during this transition period from a semi-nomadic life to one based in fixed settlements, it was difficult to determine whether the "persuasion and coercion of the missionaries and educators" had a stronger effect than the desires of the Native people themselves to accept aspects of western culture. People from the transitional generation "were convinced their children should receive a western education for two reasons: they believed the white presence was permanent; and they were impressed by the culture's technology."[41] Many Native people were convinced that education and the English language were necessary for

participation in the modern economy and job market, and the transition often was effected as much by individual, family, and community choice as it was by schoolroom pressure.

In 1915, tribal leaders from Tanana River villages told James Wickersham, Alaska's delegate to U.S. Congress, that schooling, trade skills, and jobs were high on their list of the guarantees they wanted for their people. Meeting with Wickersham in Fairbanks for two days that summer, the Tanana chiefs made it clear first of all that they wished to retain their rights to traditional lands and resources and that they did not wish to lose their customary way of life. However, they understood that social and economic structures were changing rapidly with the advance of non-Native settlers and construction of the Alaska Railroad. They wanted to protect traditional hunting and fishing rights while at the same time provide opportunities for their children in the modern world of rapidly growing human population and shrinking supplies of wild resources. Chief Thomas of Nenana told Wickersham through interpreter Paul Williams that his main objective was to improve the education system for his people.[42] Later Williams told Wickersham in English that the chiefs together had decided to ask the federal government to build more industrial schools. "You want to learn trades?" Wickersham asked, and Williams replied,

> Yes. As you told the chiefs here yesterday, you said this country would be all crowded with people coming in, and of course I know that is going to happen too, in my own knowledge, and the game will be short, the fishing will be short, the fur will be short, and everything will be short that the natives are using now and in time it is going to take money for the natives to live, and we all realize that, so I think it is time for the government to give assistance to the Indians either by themselves or through the missionaries who have been with us so long but cannot do so much because they are short of funds and workers.[43]

The chiefs voted unanimously in favor of building more industrial schools run by either by the federal government or the missionaries. Wickersham concluded the conference by telling the chiefs that he would relay their wishes to the secretary of the interior, who would then "read more about what they want, about them wanting schools and work ... to become like white people and want to learn to talk the white man's language and to work like white men."[44] The Tanana chiefs as well as the federal representatives present at the conference recognized the value of a working knowledge of English. Still, nothing in the chiefs' statement implies that they intended to replace their native language with the "white man's language." Wickersham was only responding to the desires of a group of Native

leaders who were making the best choices for their people during a time of rapidly changing conditions in Alaska.

Language in the Classroom and Community

The federal Bureau of Education was dedicated to the goal of lifting the Natives to a "higher plane of living"[45] by teaching them to participate in the institutions of modern America. "No doubt he was happy and well a century ago, but progress must come to the Eskimo as well as to the white man,"[46] one superintendent noted. A teacher in Noatak hailed the Natives' change from the old nomadic way of life to their new permanent modern houses in the village. Full participation in this new life also required a new language. As a teacher in Deering wrote in 1914, "The acquiring of the English language by the natives is of vital importance to their progress in civilization. We therefore encouraged everybody to speak English everywhere, especially in their homes, with the result that even the oldest men now use a few English words and always encourage their children in their efforts."[47]

Commenting on the progress of the replacement of the native languages with English, Robert Samms, a teacher in Selawik, said that he had made "special effort" to force the children to speak English both inside and outside the classroom. Samms, a Quaker who had worked for years in Kotzebue, was another example of a man who learned the Eskimo language and taught in it as a missionary but later,

as a teacher in a government school, believed in the plan to convert Alaska Natives to speakers of English. By 1913 he had become impatient with the pace of learning but remained hopeful about the future. "As the older generation passes away," he said, "English will become the language of the home."[48]

That same year, Robert Replogle's report from Kotzebue expressed the same thinking. Directly equating the Natives' ability to acquire the English language to their "progress in civilization," Replogle concentrated his efforts on the entire village. "We ... encouraged everybody to speak English everywhere, especially in their homes, with the result that even the oldest men now use a few English words and always encourage the children in their efforts. We have made no effort whatever to acquire the Eskimo Language." He told about a Christmas party held at the school to which he invited only those Eskimos who could understand English.[49]

Walter G. Culver, a teacher in Port Moller, devised a method of building a definite connection in the children's minds between money and the English language. He paid fifty cents to the student who spoke the least of the native language in his class, twenty-five cents to the second-best English speaker in the class, and fifteen cents to the third. As a result, he said, "The English language only was used in and around the schoolhouse except for explanation purposes. ... It was no uncommon thing to hear the children using English in their playing after school and on Saturdays."[50]

Charles W. Hawkesworth, teaching in Hydaburg in 1915, wrote that

> The English language is noticeably lacking in towns where all the people understand a tribal tongue. Since all of our people are anxious for citizenship, and since the English language is supposed to be the language used by citizens in their homes and in their conversations with each other, we endeavored to overcome the Hydah tongue by adopting the slogan 'Hydaburg, an English-speaking town in five years.' Several of the young men took it up and we talked it up in every sort of gathering, from the school chapel exercises to town council meetings and church services.[51]

From these reports written by the teachers themselves, it is difficult to tell the severity of punishment inflicted on Native children for breaking the English-only rules. Apparently it ranged from the application of myrrh and capsicum to the subtle but psychologically damaging punishment of being excluded from a school-sponsored Christmas party in Kotzebue. Most often, the teachers mentioned that punishment did occur without describing its details. From Barrow in 1915, for example, teachers T.L. Richardson and Carrie L. Richardson reported that many students opposed their rule against any use of the Eskimo language in the classroom, saying that students laughed at others who tried to learn English. "A

few sharp reproofs given to these offenders put a stop to it and by the end of the term only two or three would break the rule even when the teachers were out of the room."[52] The next year T.L. Richardson reported that "talking Eskimo in the classroom when the teacher is out" was one of the most serious disciplinary problems he faced.[53]

On the Pribilof Islands of St. Paul and St. George, the federal Bureau of Fisheries within the Department of Commerce and Labor operated schools for Aleut children under a law requiring it to regulate and manage the fur seal harvest. Agents of the bureau directed teachers to ban the Aleut language in school and on the playground and told business managers in 1914 that in all relations between the Natives and the government "only the English language shall be employed, and you will discourage in every possible way the use of any other language." One Aleut woman who was a product of those schools operated by the Bureau of Fisheries after 1910 recalled years later,

> The teachers used to put medicine, I can still taste that vile stuff, in our mouth if we spoke Aleut. They said not to do any Aleut crafts. They told our parents not to talk Aleut. We kids were afraid to speak Aleut even in our homes; we were afraid the teacher would find out and put that terrible tasting medicine in our mouths.[54]

However, certainly not everyone involved in education or missionary work in Alaska agreed with the federal government's policies. The Rev. William Duncan, who was a founder of the village of Metlakatla on Annette Island in 1887, was highly critical of government teachers, saying that any who failed to learn the local language were unqualified for the job. In personal notes written in 1915, he asked what white people would do if a Chinese schoolteacher who knew no English were given the job of teaching white children. He contended that the offices dealing with Indian education were the only departments of the federal government that were staffed with unqualified people, and that they held their jobs only because the government wished to give employment to a number of schoolteachers. In Duncan's opinion, a teacher who did not know the native language of his students could do no good in the village schools. He charged that federal policies of forced assimilation had done nothing to advance the cause of civilization among the Indians and had instead only served to make them "wards of the government" and "aliens in this free country." He used the Metlakatla Reservation as an example of how local control of economic and social life as well as respect for traditional language and culture had produced far better results.[55]

Episcopalian Archdeacon Hudson Stuck was another constant and vocal critic of government policies. Traveling winters by dog team and summers by riverboat between 1904 and 1920, Stuck covered Interior Alaska from Fort Yukon downriver

to Anvik and as far north as Point Hope on the northwest coast. He maintained that federal Bureau of Education policies aimed at forcing Natives to abandon their language, customs, and methods of subsistence food gathering would result in their total dependence on government charity. He worked to ensure that Natives remained self-sufficient and rooted in their own culture while learning skills that would allow them to become wage earners as well.[56] As a missionary, Stuck was concerned about the Natives' spiritual lives and about their physical health and welfare, but their need to remain independent and self-sufficient was foremost in his mind. He believed that in addition to a regular course of study Indians should learn carpentry, agriculture, and housekeeping, and that traditional skills, including knowledge of native languages and customs, should be preserved.

The Bureau of Education, Stuck wrote, shared the common fault of other federal agencies in its "detached and lofty, not to say supercilious, attitude." He charged that it was "folly" to compel Indian children to sit in classrooms during periods when their families were engaged in hunting, fishing, or trapping activities. "A race of hardy, peaceful, independent, self-supporting illiterates is of more value and worthy of more respect than a race of literate paupers," he wrote. "Be it remembered also that many of these 'illiterates' can read the Bible in their own tongue and can make written communication with one another in the same – very scornful as the officials of the bureau have been about such attainment." As an example of the government's "scornful" treatment of the native language, he cited

federal rules that prohibited use of the school building after hours for teaching Bible lessons in Athabaskan. The rules required that all instruction in the school be in English only.[57] Stuck said that to the ordinary government teacher in Alaska, civilization meant "teaching the Indians to call themselves Mr. and Mrs. and teaching the women to wear millinery, with a contemptuous attitude toward the native language and all native customs." He conceded, however, that "the less intelligent grade of missionary sometimes falls into the same easy rut." To him, the "nobler ideal" was to work for "an Indian who is honest, healthy and kindly, skilled in hunting and trapping, versed in his native Bible and liturgy, even though he be entirely ignorant of English."[58]

But those in government service were generally proud of their record in Alaska, and they pointed to progress in the villages as evidence of the success of federal programs. Teachers in the field agreed that their efforts had been well rewarded. Copper Center teacher Arthur Miller contended that "the work of the Bureau of Education among Copper River Indians has been very potent, and almost the only uplifting moral influence, which is after all the only right foundation for education."[59] Similarly, Willietta Kuppler wrote from Anvik that the Episcopal mission school that had been operating there for twenty-eight years had done practically nothing to improve literacy among the local Native children, and that the village needed a government school to achieve lasting progress. "The tone of the village must be raised as a whole," Kuppler wrote. "In my experience with both

schools [missionary and government] in Alaska, the government school has done the only lasting, effective work with Natives." She said that her experience in Alaska had demonstrated that in villages that had government schools, every Native could read, write, and speak at least some English.[60]

Meanwhile, observers from outside the teaching profession also praised the work that the Bureau of Education had done in rural Alaska villages. Greenlandic explorer Knud Rasmussen, who led an expedition across Greenland, northern Canada, and Alaska from 1921 to 1924, suggested that education was a vital part of helping the Eskimos succeed in the modern economy and society. "There can be no step back to the stone age for any people that has once had contact with the white man," Rasmussen wrote.[61] Upon reaching Barrow on his journey westward, Rasmussen observed that as a result of schooling sponsored by the U.S. government, the Native population there was "industrious, ambitious and independent, a wonderful testimony to the value of systematic educational methods." He referred to Sheldon Jackson as "the Alaskan Eskimos' greatest benefactor," adding that "all the young people of the present day speak English as well as any American, and have thus the first qualifications for entering into competition with immigrant whites."[62]

Rasmussen was born in Greenland to a missionary father and spoke Greenlandic as his first language. He recognized English as a necessary skill in modern civilization, but at the same time he expressed regret that Eskimo customs

would die out as a result of economic and social development. "Before many years are past, their religion will be extinct, and the white man will have conquered all, the country and its people; their thoughts, their visions and their faith." Upon reaching Nunivak Island in southwestern Alaska, he wrote that the "poor and barren" country there had nothing to attract non-Natives and that the people were cut off from the development occurring in the rest of Alaska. "Only recently has the Bureau of Education begun to set up schools in this region, but in most places the natives are still heathen, cannot read, or even speak English."[63] Rasmussen's statements reflect the conflict inherent in the advance of modern civilization into remote areas. He believed in the value of English language and literacy to the aboriginal people of the North, but he also recognized that too often the loss of traditional languages and customs accompanied the presence of modern systems of education, economy, and society. As a Dano-Greenlander, Rasmussen did not accept the idea that learning a new language necessarily meant abandonment of the old; ideally Northern Natives could retain both.

However, many teachers in Alaska recognized the negative influence white miners and explorers were having on Alaska Natives, and their solution was even greater efforts through the civilizing effects of the schools. Laura Keller, a teacher in Ruby, wrote in 1921 that nearly all the white people in Alaska were intent only on making a quick fortune and then heading back Outside. The only permanent

citizens, she said, were the Natives, and therefore their education in English was the only way to establish a "permanent and loyal citizenry."[64]

The work of the village teacher in the 1920s was no less a missionary calling than it was in Sheldon Jackson's time. The bureau often hired husband-and-wife teams and expected them not only to educate the Natives but also to inspire and guide them toward a civilized life. They were asked to provide health care, teach industrial and homemaking skills, maintain school facilities, and oversee reindeer herding. Within government, old attitudes changed slowly and many officials still equated civilization of the Native Americans with conversion to English. The Commissioner of Indian Affairs in 1921 referred to many Natives as "non-English speaking people just emerging from a life of ignorance and superstition."[65] The purpose of the United States government in Indian education remained "to save non-English speaking children from reaching their majority unfitted for American citizenship."[66]

In fact, knowledge of English had always been a pre-requisite of citizenship for Native Americans. From the beginning of the government's work in education in Alaska, officials had proclaimed that their programs were aimed at fitting aboriginal people for full citizenship in the United States. As part of the conditions of such status, however, Native Alaskans were expected to give up the traditions of their language and culture. "The native applying for citizenship," Superintendent for Education for Alaska Natives William Lopp wrote, "must, under oath, renounce

his adherence to tribal customs. No certificate of citizenship should be issued to a native unable to read and write the English language."[67] On June 2, 1924, President Calvin Coolidge signed a federal law granting citizenship and voting rights to all Native Americans who had not already become citizens. The federal Board of Indian Commissioners proclaimed that with a stroke of his pen, Coolidge had certified that "the American Indians had been merged into the body politic of the United States" and had gone by the masses to exercise their right of suffrage.[68] In the same year, Alaska Territorial Governor Scott C. Bone spoke of the resentment that had built up in the territory because members of the "primitive" class were allowed to vote. He said there was an urgent need for a "literacy test law to preserve the integrity of the ballot."[69] One year later in Alaska, the Territorial Legislature responded by enacting a law aimed at restricting the Native vote. That body passed a literacy law requiring that all voters in any election in the territory be able to read and write the English language. The law, which was similar in effect to those enacted in the South to keep large numbers of Blacks away from the voting booth, remained in effect until statehood.[70]

In 1926, William Hamilton of the Alaska Division of the Bureau of Education summed up forty years of work in the territory by reporting that "primitive conditions have gradually disappeared, except in some of the remotest settlements which the bureau has not yet been able to reach." He said that as a result of education, the Native people enjoyed modern houses, power boats, and the foods

available in stores. Natives were employed as cooks, janitors, hospital workers, loggers, and reindeer herders, Hamilton declared, all because of "the steady advance through the years of the Bureau of Education's school system."[71] Territorial Governor George Parks concurred, observing that "in a single generation many Alaskan Natives have advanced from a state of barbarism to a pastoral people."[72]

As the presence of government schools in Native villages grew rapidly in the first three decades of the century, missionary schools found themselves unable to compete with the federal education system, and the pro-language influence of some missionary groups was weakened as a result. The Jesuit Catholics complained bitterly. Father Philip Delon, the Superior for northern Alaska, wrote in 1928 that Catholic boarding schools were "in danger of extinction" because the government was building schools in nearly every village. He argued that the education provided at the government schools was far inferior to a Catholic education, which emphasized "the spirit of initiative and self-reliance." He mentioned specifically that all Catholic teachers should learn the native language of the students they taught.[73] It was a principle Writing to Martin Lonneux at Akulurak (St. Marys) in 1926, Delon said that he regretted that Lonneux had found too little time to study the Eskimo language. "It's a great pity," he told him, "for you can never be an Alaskan missionary unless and until you are sufficiently acquainted with the native

language to be able to convey to the Eskimo the knowledge of God and His mysteries."[74]

Nevertheless, policies that called for civilization of the Natives through cultural and linguistic unity continued to enjoy popular support in Alaska. *The Alaskan*, a weekly newspaper published in Petersburg, printed an editorial proclaiming that the paper opposed the construction of a Native school "in or near a community whose language is other than English." The editor told his readers that *The Alaskan* was "opposed to continuation and perpetuation of the Thlinget [sic], Psimpshean [sic], Haida, or any other language as un-American and retarding the more rapid assimilation into the body politic or absorption of nations within a nation."[75]

1920s, an 'Era of Contradictions'

As the Board of Indian Commissioners put it, federal authorities had always focused on the belief that "the chief objective of the national administration of Indian affairs (was) the complete absorption sooner or later of the American Indians into the body politic of the nation." By 1929, the board was well pleased with the government's progress, proclaiming that "there will be found no savages, wild men, or untamed nomads among our American Indians today."[76] In Alaska the Bureau of Education made its English language policy clear while it failed even to address the question of whether or not the people should also retain their native

languages. The bureau continued to impress upon Natives the realization that participation in modern society, commerce, and politics required the use of English as the language of everyday discourse and trade. Jonathan H. Wagner, the chief of the Alaska Division of the federal Bureau of Education, wrote in "A Course of Study for United States Schools of Native of Alaska" that teachers must provide the guidance Native children need to develop service and citizenship. He emphasized mastery of English as strongly as ever and told teachers to demand performance. "The fact that the natural language of pupils is other than English should not lessen a teacher's efforts nor serve as an excuse for inferior results," the booklet said.[77] Teachers were expected to treat every hour of school life as an opportunity to teach the "ideal" of oral and written English. Instructions went on to tell teachers that they should "Continue to drill to correct common errors of speech. Prove that good English is a social necessity, and that one is likely to be humiliated some day because of his poor English."[78]

Another bulletin, this time published by the Department of the Interior in Washington, D.C., and approved by the secretary of the interior in 1928, spelled out regulations for all Indian schools under the U.S. flag. Item 18, "Use of English," directed that all pupils were required to converse with all employees in or out of the classroom in English and that all employees were to use only English when on duty.[79]

That same set of regulations also sought to guarantee regular school attendance. Truancy had been a problem educators in Alaska had been unable to solve since the beginning of federal education programs, and they had pushed for a compulsory attendance law for years. As early as 1887, the U.S. Commissioner of Education had written "Rules for Obligatory Attendance at Alaskan Schools" aimed at forcing parents to enroll their children.[80] The edict had little effect, mainly because it was unenforceable in remote villages and the teachers' only recourse was to go directly to the people's houses and personally rouse truant children out of bed. In 1920, U.S. Congress had passed a measure giving the secretary of the interior authority to make and enforce strict attendance requirements for Native children and punish those who refused to comply by placing them in boarding schools far from home.[81] The 1928 regulations cited that law as its justification for requiring regular attendance of Native children and its authority to round up truants.

Historians of federal Indian policy have referred to the decade of the 1920s as "an era of contradictions." Teachers in classrooms across the nation still enforced programs based on suppression of Native American languages and cultures, but at the same time many politicians and bureaucrats as well as a variety of advocacy groups promoted the idea that cultural pluralism was preferable to the old concept of assimilation. As historian David Wallace Adams explained, "a new breed of

reformers ferociously assaulted not only the government's conduct of Indian policy but its ideological underpinnings as well."[82]

One of the most prominent of these reformers was John Collier, a progressive educator and social worker who, while traveling through the southwest in 1920, had lived with the Taos Pueblo Indians and found his calling as an activist in favor of Native American rights. According to historian Kenneth Philip, "Collier thought he had found on the New Mexico frontier a solution to the question of why materialism and selfish individualism would dominate and destroy man." Through his American Indian Defense Association, Collier fought against those forces that sought to assimilate Indians into mainstream America. He opposed the continuation of the Dawes General Allotment Act, and advocated instead a policy of pluralism that would recognize the inherent values found in Native American languages, education, customs, communities, and cultures. Rather than allotment of individual parcels of land, he supported government programs that would help the Indians restore their traditional communal use and occupancy.[83]

Critics beginning with William A. Jones and Francis Leupp twenty years earlier had charged that federal policies failed to meet the goals of assimilation and economic independence for Native Americans, and repeated calls for reform eventually had their effect. Historian Clyde Ellis referred to the federal government's move to "roll back the forced assimilation campaign" as the most notable change for Native Americans in the first three decades of the twentieth

century. Bureaucrats at the highest levels turned away from the policies of Atkins, Morgan, and Pratt and embraced a philosophy that encouraged Indians to preserve the roots of their culture, including language. These critics reasoned that if the education system could not force Native Americans to renounce their tribal identity, at least it could train them to participate in the world of modern industry.[84]

In 1926 Secretary of the Interior Hubert Work ordered an independent investigation of federal Indian policy and hired a department of the Brookings Institution to begin the study. Commonly known as the Meriam Report for its principal investigator, Lewis Meriam, the document clearly and bluntly laid out a list of reasons for the overall failure of Indian policy. It began by stating that an "overwhelming majority" of Indians were poor and had not adjusted to the "economic and social system of the dominant white civilization."[85] The plan for individual ownership of land allotments with the intention of teaching the Indians to become farmers had produced only increased poverty as the Indians sold their allotments and the money provided "unearned income to permit the continuance of a life of idleness."[86]

In terms of Indian education, the report found that "the first and foremost need ... is a change in point of view." Policies based on taking Indian children away from their home environment and placing them in boarding schools were outmoded and should be changed to stress the value of home and family life. "Both the government and the missionaries have often failed to study, understand, and

take a sympathetic attitude toward Indian ways, Indian ethics, and Indian religion," the report said. "The exceptional government worker and the exceptional missionary have demonstrated what can be done by building on what is good in the Indian's own life." As part of its recommendations for Indian education, the Meriam Report concluded that

> The real goals of education are not 'reading, writing, and arithmetic' – not even teaching Indians to speak English, though that is important – but sound health, both mental and physical, good citizenship in the sense of an understanding participation in community life, ability to earn one's own living honestly and efficiently in a socially worthwhile vocation, comfortable and desirable home and family life, and good character.[87]

The Meriam Report turned sharply away from traditional federal policy also in its view of the amount of time it would take to accomplish the goals that the government set out for itself. Whereas Richard Pratt and Sheldon Jackson expected the civilizing influences of education to effect immediate change, the Meriam committee predicted that "even if the work with these Indians is highly efficient, it will take three generations to prepare them for modern life."[88]

Policy makers within the federal bureaucracy generally concurred with the Meriam Report and took steps to put its recommendations into practice. Charles J. Rhoads, Commissioner of Indian Affairs under President Herbert Hoover, said that the federal government had recognized the error of taking Native children out of their home environments and forcing them to accept an education that bore little relationship to actual village needs. The endeavor was to close as many of the centralized boarding schools as possible and use the remaining open ones only for those students for whom local facilities were not available. The effort, Rhoads noted, was "to provide the Indian's education in his own community setting, in close touch with his immediate economic and social requirements."[89]

Rhoads also questioned the old federal policies that were based on the demand for immediate civilization of the Indians. He acknowledged that in the process of becoming self-sufficient civilized members of American society, Indians need not give up the best of their traditions. Native Americans' arts, crafts, and associations should be preserved and encouraged, he said, as part of their development and survival.[90]

New Deal Policy and Alaska Practice

Significantly for Alaska, it was during Rhoads's tenure as commissioner that the federal government transferred the administration of schools for Alaska Natives from the Bureau of Education to the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and a new agency

called the Alaska School Service was based in Juneau. This change in 1931 was part of an overall effort to shift as many government offices as possible from Washington, D.C., to the territory itself. The network of education for Alaska Natives had grown over the years to include not only schools, but also health care, reindeer herding, and industrial training. School buildings were the center of community activity in rural areas, and were the site of night-school sessions where the teacher conducted community-wide lessons in civic and social responsibility. William Hamilton, assistant chief of the Alaska division, noted that many teachers held special night classes to teach English to adults. "Of necessity," Hamilton added, the teacher "assumes the functions of a community leader, an arbiter in disputes, a censor of morals, a preserver of peace, and a public nurse and medical advisor."[91] In the year of the shift of administration to the new office in Juneau, the federal government in Alaska maintained 93 schools with 195 teachers and an enrollment of 3,899 Native students. In addition, there were industrial training boarding schools in Eklutna, Kanakanak, and White Mountain.[92] In the opinion of the secretary of the interior, it was "futile" to attempt to manage such a diversity of activities and locations from Washington.[93]

Emphasis on the English language continued in the early 1930s. President Herbert Hoover's interior secretary, Ray Lamar Wilbur, was one government policy maker who held to a traditional stance in Indian affairs and did not embrace the reform philosophy that had become increasingly popular over the previous

decade. Wilbur's assumption was that Natives must replace their traditional languages with the language of American society, commerce, and education if they were to succeed as citizens. He compared Indians to children who had been allowed to nurse too long, and he suggested that the thing to do was to give the Indian "a pickle and let it howl."[94]

In terms of education in Alaska, Wilbur declared in 1930 that the government's purpose was to provide a modern American education so that the Natives could be "altered from wards of the government to producers of export commodities."[95] One of those commodities was reindeer meat and byproducts, and teachers used the herds as a way of reinforcing the need for English. Bookkeeping and correspondence concerning breeding, management, exports, and health of the animals all had to be conducted in the language of American commerce. A teacher in Newhalen, for example, reported in 1933 that the Natives who worked with the herds had vastly improved their language skills. "The boys who are at the reindeer camps are now able to make accurate reports to me concerning their work, and they keep their own books very carefully," she wrote. "Some of them also keep track of all game killed and trapped during the year." [96]

Teachers reported increasing use of English in the community and among the older generations in their own homes. The teacher at Newhalen said that children learned the language quickly and that they regularly practiced it at home. She said that it was important to use community gatherings to emphasize the need for the

language and to conduct those meetings in English, and added that one of the best ways to encourage Natives to use the language was by teaching them songs.

> The natives old and young are much like little children in many respects, and they have to be told and shown many times before they can be expected to progress much. I believe the very best way to reach these people and to help them progress is by having a set program of study for them and to carry this out regularly and promptly day by day. Give them lots of music and art which they enjoy and give them every opportunity possible to play and converse with children their own ages who speak English. Then too there should be as many community meetings as possible where old and young can assemble for singing programs and religious services.[97]

Natives in many areas of Interior Alaska had seen far less contact with white people than the coastal Natives had by the 1930s. Teacher Ethelyn Bettles reported from Koyukuk in 1934 that many families in that area traveled constantly in search of fish, game, and furs, and they therefore had no use for the education system. The families who had children, however, made great sacrifices to stay in the village and keep their children in school. Mrs. Bettles was a teacher who also equated education and the English language with progress and material wealth. She

observed that to those Natives who preferred to move with the seasons, modern goods were a burden. "These nomadic habits make it difficult to interest these Indians in possessing more than the minimum amount of equipment for their needs," she wrote, and the lack of English was no impediment to their lifestyle. But to those who chose to stay in the village to take advantage of education and health care opportunities available there, the inability to speak the language of modern life and trade was a distinct handicap and a hindrance to their progress.[98]

American naturalist and writer Robert Marshall, in his book about life in the village of Wiseman in the early 1930s, noted that the parents of Native children were "made happier by getting some sort of white education," and that the children themselves were "without exception enthusiastic about school." He quoted the local school teacher as saying that she did not agree with those village residents who had told her that she should forbid the Native children from speaking their own language in the school yard. "I could never see why," the teacher told Marshall. "It's no use for them to forget their own language and culture just because they're learning a new one."[99]

Meanwhile, teachers in many other schools across Alaska continued to punish Native children for breaking English-only rules. Peter Kalifornsky, a Dena'ina Athabaskan from the Kenai area, wrote in a collection of his writings published in 1991 that he vividly recalled a teacher who beat him with a stick for speaking his

language. "My English wasn't too good, and he hit me several times so hard it broke the skin and caused a boil."[100]

Physical punishment was documented also by Sadie Brower Neakok, who recalled it both as a student and a teacher in Barrow. She told of one teacher who slapped the children's hands or made them stand in the corner for speaking Inupiaq. She said that while working as a BIA teacher in the 1930s, the teachers were "instructed not to speak in our native language or use our native language in the school, and to instruct the children that they can't use their native language, even on the school grounds and recess time." Those who broke the rule were left out of school parties.[101]

However, the government's notion of progress for Native Americans had been evolving gradually under the influence of John Collier and his fellow reformers, and in 1933 federal policy began a process of radical change when Franklin Roosevelt took office and appointed Collier as his Commissioner of Indian Affairs. Even though actual classroom practice may have changed very little, ideas about reforming Indian education first expressed at the beginning of the century by Jones and Leupp and then amplified by the Meriam Report were the basis of Roosevelt's New Deal for Native Americans. As part of that plan, Collier helped push through the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934, which was aimed directly at undoing the General Allotment Act and restoring tribal political rights and ownership of land. The Allotment Act, in Collier's opinion, had succeeded

only in drastically diminishing Indian land holdings as non-Natives bought up lands that the Indians had received with unrestricted title. The Roosevelt administration's New Deal policy recognized that Natives function best as part of a "tribe or clan" and that identity with such a group was, in Collier's words, "a spiritual necessity."[102] It was clear in Collier's mind that the federal government's historic attempts to merge Native Americans into white American life had failed.

Also during Collier's administration the word "bilingual" first appeared in reference to the education of Native Americans. In his annual report for 1935, Collier promised to scrap obsolete teaching methods and stop the practice of destroying aboriginal language and culture as a way of forcing Natives into mainstream American society. In his opinion, the aim of Indian education should be

> to deliver Indian adolescents fully and practically prepared to make the most of the available resources, adolescents in whom the tie that binds them to their homeland has been strengthened rather than broken, Indian youths with wide horizons, bilingual, literate, yet proud of their racial heritage, to become completely self-supporting, even though going without some of the mechanical accessories of the present day.[103]

Collier viewed education as the fundamental purpose of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and he hired two of the era's leading proponents of reform, Carson Ryan and Willard Beatty, to head the Education Division. Ryan was a nationally recognized researcher who had been responsible for much of the education section of the Meriam Report, and Beatty was a leader of the Progressive Education movement, which was known for its emphasis on a curriculum specifically suited to the needs of the individual child and his community. Specifically for Alaska, the Collier administration mentioned the need to upgrade facilities and expand into at least twenty-five villages that had never had schools. The BIA Education Division believed that textbooks for Alaska Native students should be revised so they dealt with objects familiar to students and would prepare children for life in their own environment.[104] Beatty worked to establish schools that would maintain the connection between the Indian child and the life of his home and community. Above all, he wished to avoid boarding schools that made Native children unwilling to return to their own people while at the same time failing to train them to make their living anywhere else.

A bulletin entitled "Public Education in Alaska" published in 1936 by the Department of the Interior mentioned the increasing need for education among Alaska Natives as white contact increased and supplies of wild food resources declined. Of three main goals for education in Alaska, the bulletin listed first and foremost the need to provide Natives with "a working knowledge of English."[105]

Second and third were the goals of improving economic efficiency and promoting a higher standard of living in the villages, encompassing modern standards of health, hygiene, sanitation, and housing. The assumption was clear that the second and third goals depended on the first.

One year later the Interior Department published a "Handbook for Alaska Field Representatives" which also emphasized the value of English to Native Alaskans. The book began with a statement in which Commissioner Collier outlined the policy of supporting and appreciating all Native American cultures so that they could grow and live and be "brought into the stream of American culture as a whole." He went on to declare that "those Indians whose culture, civic tradition, and inherited institutions are still strong and virile should be encouraged and helped to develop their life in their own patterns, not as segregated minorities but as noble elements in our common life."[106] The department's objectives for Alaska Natives as listed in the handbook were much the same as those in the 1936 bulletin: to teach the skills needed to improve the standard of living in rural villages, to encourage the production of Native arts and crafts as a means of economic development, and "to enable the Native to develop a mastery of spoken and written English which will enable him to function effectively in his language contacts with the white man."[107]

Under Collier, the government changed its attitude about suppression of aboriginal languages. Federal policy during his administration no longer focused

solely on assimilation, and this allowed bureaucrats and educators to see language and other traits of Native American culture as valuable sources of individual and collective pride and identity. Yet in the 1930s government schools suffered from a lack of bilingual classroom materials and adequately trained teachers. In Collier's view, English was vital for the Native American who wished to succeed in school and take part in the modern social, economic, and political systems, and he considered it a supplement to a person's native language, not necessarily a replacement for it. English language policy, therefore, was well formed, but a concrete policy for also preserving native languages still remained undeveloped.

The changing philosophy at the top levels of government, however, did not always filter down to the local classroom or administrative level. In many villages across Alaska the practice of suppressing the native languages continued even though there was no longer the directive from above that the native languages were forbidden and that Native Americans must convert wholly to the English language before they could be considered fit for American citizenship. Jay Ellis Ransom is an example of a teacher who was directed by an administrator in Alaska to enforce a ban on the use of the native language but found the English-only rule to be a detriment to effective teaching. Ransom, whom the federal government hired in 1936 to teach in the Aleut village of Nikolski, wrote in an article forty years later that even during the Collier era he received strict orders from his school superintendent to forbid use of the Aleut language both in school and by adults in

the village. "As events turned out," Ransom wrote, "such an order proved impossible to obey. ... I could not expect my roomful of youngsters suddenly to grab English out of the air to talk to me." Immediately with the help of a few adults who had learned some English, he began an intensive study of Aleut linguistics, memorized some phrases, and encouraged the use of his students' native language in class. He taught English as a foreign language, "an educational concept totally at odds with the national practice of the day," and by the end of the year he found that the students spoke and understood much more than they would have under a system that required the exclusive use of English.[108]

In 1941, Commissioner Collier wrote that Native Americans had much to contribute to the improvement of American civilization. "The Indians are a sturdy people," he said, "clinging tenaciously to their customs, their languages, and their group and tribal life."[109] Collier interpreted the relationship of Native Americans to the federal government in terms of reconciling the right of cultural independence for small groups with the demands of a dominant industrial society. In the early 1940s, federal BIA schools started bilingual programs in Navajo communities, and educators began to recognize the academic advantages of teaching students in their own languages. The government never lost sight of the necessity of teaching English, but it took on a more tolerant view of cultural differences. Collier summed up the policy by saying that Natives' success in civic affairs, the management of

their own economic situation, and in social programs depended on their ability to use the English language.[110]

The government's plans for economic development in rural Alaska reflected this dependence on fluency in English. In 1938 the government organized a crafts program designed to encourage production and marketing of traditional items such as baskets, blankets, ivory carvings, and fur garments. By 1941, eighty-five of the 118 Bureau of Indian Affairs stations in Alaska were conducting craft programs.[111] Along with reindeer herding, the marketing of arts and crafts was rural Alaskans' entryway into the cash economy, and it required a variety of skills including the use of oral and written English. A manual for teachers in schools for Native Americans in 1941 explained the government's view of the necessity of English, and it recognized the need for continued use of native languages.

> It is self-evident that the first step in any program of instruction must be to develop in the children the ability to speak, understand, and think in the English language. Every effort shall be made to provide activities and other forms of encouragement for children to use English in their daily associations in the classroom and on the playgrounds. As language expression is essential to the development of thought, the use of native languages by Indian children may not be forbidden or discouraged.[112]

Collier's progressive ideas in Indian affairs were, however, a short-lived phenomenon. As historian Francis Paul Prucha concluded in his summary of Collier's influence on education, "bilingual education made little headway for it faced the almost insurmountable obstacles of lack of trained instructors and of bilingual books, to say nothing of the traditional disdain for Indian languages within the Indian service." By 1941, the war effort had severely cut into the interior department's budget for Indian education, and as the war progressed, Indian schools shifted their emphasis from cross-cultural education to vocational training for jobs in urban industrial centers.[113] Historian Margaret Szasz has pointed out that Collier learned early in his term as commissioner that his directives from above were unable to change long-held prejudices against native language, religion, and culture within the federal bureaucracy.[114]

Publications of other divisions of the Department of the Interior also reveal that Collier's progressive thinking was far from universally accepted. For example, the Division of Territories and Island Possessions, which had responsibility for overall government activities in Alaska, published a booklet in 1945 designed to provide information about the territory and promote post-war population growth. It painted a picture of a modern harmonious society in which some members of a fully assimilated Native population still practiced traditional customs. For the most part, however, the "stone age" people whom the gold stampeders had found in 1898 had adapted well to twentieth century life, the booklet declared. "Alaska is as

American as hominy grits, baked beans, or apple pie. It is American in language, customs, and politics. It is part of the United States, like Wyoming and Alabama."[115]

Even though the New Deal for American Indians did not achieve the broad changes Collier envisioned, it did advance the notion that Indians themselves should determine their own futures, and it sought to enable the tribes to live as culturally distinct minorities within American society.[116] Frustrated with his lack of support and progress, however, Collier resigned in 1945. World War II had a profound effect on Native Americans, moving masses of the population off the reservations and either into the military or into jobs in urban industrial centers. Federal policy reflected this shift and once again concentrated its efforts on education for assimilation into mainstream American life and jobs in the modern economy. By the late 1940s, the progressive cross-cultural education ideas of the Collier era were no longer part of federal policy, and congressional funding cuts reduced programs to what one historian referred to as "the pre-Meriam Report interpretation of education."[117] Even Willard Beatty, who continued as head of the BIA Education Division until 1952, altered his thinking to reflect the federal focus on assimilation and training for jobs in the post-war economy. Beatty still believed that the schools should not pressure the Indian student to "abandon his culture, his gods, and his way of life," but at the same time he asserted that education should provide him with the opportunity to "assimilate himself" into the mainstream social

and political culture. He observed "an increasing desire upon the part of the Indian to speak English, to identify himself with his fellow Americans." Therefore, he continued, the Native American "must be taught all those elements in cultural behavior that will permit his easy transition from life among reservation Indians to life among urban non-Indians."[118]

Changing Attitudes

In Alaska, even in the midst of this renewed federal effort to achieve assimilation through education, some classroom teachers began to accept the idea that students in a bilingual classroom learn all subjects, including English, more efficiently than they do when they are forced to convert wholly to a foreign language. Writing a report on the school in Savoonga in 1956, education specialist Warren Tiffany of Nome suggested that teachers should present primer reading materials to children in their own language before addressing them in English. He said that if literate community adults helped the teachers with interpretations and translations, there was every reason to expect that use of the native language would promote acquisition of English.[119]

A year later in a report on the school in Selawik, Tiffany enumerated thirteen guidelines for a successful language program in the schools. He began with the assumption that while fluency in English was highly desirable for anyone living in the United States, forced suppression of anyone's native language was not only

unproductive but also a violation of democratic principles. He contended that people abandoned their native languages only when they became ashamed of or indifferent to their culture. The main problem faced by educators, therefore, was to preserve native languages as a symbol of cultural pride while at the same time successfully teaching English. He challenged teachers to become as familiar as possible with the native language of their students and to make learning English a positive and stimulating experience for them. "Most important of all is to develop the desire to talk and to furnish the opportunity to talk," he concluded.[120]

Many Alaska Native leaders who wished to provide opportunities for their people to grow and prosper in the modern economy were dissatisfied with the quality of education that was available to them in government schools. William Paul of Juneau, President of the Alaska Native Brotherhood, told Secretary of the Interior Fred Seaton in 1956 that his people were being ill-served by the bureaucracy. He expressed a strong desire among the Natives of Southeastern Alaska to learn English.

> We have had years of suffering while the government did nothing about tuberculosis, infant mortality, typhoid, malnutrition, crippled children, generations of children growing to maturity without one day of schooling, and crowds of adults turned out of the federal schools administered by assistant administrators and assistant to assistant

administrators, and yet unable to talk enough English to hold a job. We are the victims, the untouchables, and unteachables.[121]

Missionary Linguistic Work

Throughout the first half of the century, Jesuit and Moravian missionaries continued their linguistic work in Alaska. After Francis Barnum and Jules Jetté, the next Jesuit scholar of the Yup'ik language was Martin Lonneux. He received early training in the language from Jetté, and he went on after Jetté's death in 1927 to revise the spelling system for the language. His publications in Yup'ik included collections of prayers and hymns, the Mass, and a Catechism. Jesuit historian Segundo Llorente concluded, however, that Lonneux's dedicated linguistic work came thirty years too late to do much good for the language. When his books were published in the 1940s, he said, "the natives were already moving over gradually into English and a number of priests believed in pushing the English and downgrading the Eskimo language, and so the books became soon a relic of antiquity."[122]

The Moravians continued to publish Yup'ik material in the writing system they had developed themselves. John Hinz was a dedicated student of the language, and, during the time he was collecting information for the grammar that was finally published in 1944, he worked on translations of the Bible. In consultation with Native speakers of the language, Hinz published a Yup'ik version of *Passion Week*

Manual in 1915 as well a translation of the Gospel of Mark. His translation of all four gospels was published by the American Bible Society in 1929. The most significant Moravian linguist after Hinz was Ferdinand Drebert who served in the Yup'ik area for nearly forty years beginning in 1912. He published collections of hymns and other religious material, and in 1956 completed a full translation of the New Testament.

By mid-century, however, many people even within the Catholic Church had started to question whether or not the effort was worthwhile. Lonneux was one Jesuit missionary who always insisted that it was. In 1948 he told fellow Jesuit Louis Renner that he did not share the opinion that English was becoming so dominant that, within a decade, it would no longer be necessary for missionaries to learn the native language. He said that after his twenty-four years of trying to get the Eskimos to use a little English, they still persisted in speaking their native language in the home. "You can be sure it will take many decades before they do learn English," he said.[123]

Lonneux had worked as hard as anyone to learn and use the language, and to him, even as late as 1948, it was "simply foolish" to believe that Eskimos would switch to English. "If I had seen such a possibility in even three decades," he wrote, "I would never have broken my health in trying to do the heavy work on the language as I did."[124]

Lonneux may have been a great missionary, but he was a poor prophet. All the linguistic work done by him and other Jesuits such as Barnum and Jetté, by the Moravians Hinz and Drebert, Episcopalians MacDonald and Chapman, and by Russian Orthodox priests did not stop the assimilating forces of the federal government along with modern economic, social, and political factors. By 1960, English had taken over as the dominant language of education, business, government, and religion.

Even so, after nearly a century of U.S. ownership of Alaska, Alaska Natives still had not transformed themselves into a monolingual English-speaking patriotic citizenry in the mold formed by Sheldon Jackson, N.H.R. Dawson and others of the 1880s who believed that total assimilation through destruction of native tribal customs and traditions could be achieved within a single generation. Even though individuals might easily be transformed in appearance – and even in language and habit – their collective tribal identity was more persistent. Thousands of years of accumulated cultural and linguistic heritage were too tenacious to die out in such a short period of time. By the mid-twentieth century, attitudes showed signs of change from those of the early days in the territory. Even though evidence shows that teachers in many classrooms across Alaska still practiced native language suppression, some federal policy makers had begun to recognize the error of attempting to achieve cultural change by force and to accept the idea of language as a source of identity and pride for both individuals and groups. The government's

attempts to solidify English as America's national language make it clear that it understood all along the unifying values found in a common language. That was the basic reason that suppression of language was such an important part of the plan for assimilation. However, gradually over time, federal policy changed to reflect the idea that it was possible, even desirable, for Natives to retain their language as a part of their own culture and at the same time learn English as the medium of modern society, economy, politics, and law.

But by that time also, severe damage had been done to Alaska's Native languages. In many cases they were no longer spoken as the primary language of the home, and conversation between the older and the younger generations was conducted in English. As Alaska Native people increasingly came into contact with white America, they became more dependent on the cash economy and material goods. Modern education and health care changed traditional living patterns because access to them was in centralized villages and therefore unavailable to those who continued a nomadic life. This changed hunting and fishing patterns and made modern tools, equipment, utensils, and food products essential. Success in education and trade, and even perpetuation of native subsistence, increasingly depended on knowledge of English.

The federal government's new enlightened ideas, which took shape during the Collier years, were the formative stages of Native bilingual education programs that had their real beginnings in the 1960s. Assimilation had taken on a new

definition. Government policy still emphasized the need for Natives to conform to the standards set by white America, but it also allowed room for diversity of cultures. In terms of Alaska Native languages, that meant that children were encouraged to hold on to their traditions as a symbol of their cultural identity, so long as they adopted English as their primary language and accepted it as a practical skill necessary for success in American life. A teachers' manual printed by the Juneau office of the Bureau of Indian Affairs in 1957 said that education was imperative for Native children because an increasing population was quickly destroying the opportunity to live a life dependent on wild natural resources. "As you will see after a short period of observation," teachers were told, "a Native village offers little or no opportunity for employment, so the Native must be prepared to compete in the labor markets of urban centers."[125] The need to speak, understand, and think in the English language, the booklet said, was "self-evident." It warned further that because teachers of Alaska Native students must deal with "problems of social adaptation and cultural assimilation as well as mastery of the English language," traditional teaching materials would not always work. It explained that subject matter should relate to children's environment and daily experiences and that teaching in the native language often speeds up acquisition of English.[126]

Meanwhile, other reports indicate that some educators within the BIA continued to stress the need for Native Americans to adopt English as the language

of the home and community and the need to teach exclusively in English. In 1958, a study conducted by a team of education scholars and published by the Department of the Interior concluded that "the extent to which a family or community has integrated itself with the dominant culture of the nation has a very great influence upon the school achievement of its children." It added that the lack of pre-school English was definitely a "handicap" and that Indian people would be forced to choose either to embrace the major culture or allow their children to fall further behind in school. In defining "acculturation," the authors listed first the "habitual use of spoken and written English in the home and community as a means of communication."[127]

Thus, the "era of contradictions" continued through the 1950s. However, the following decade was a turning point with civil rights legislation, the beginning of bilingual education, and a new respect for the close connection between language and Native American cultural identity. Before the end of the 1960s, federal policy would be directed toward a middle ground that recognized the right and ability of Native Americans to practice their distinct language and culture while succeeding academically as well. Bilingual education as established by Congress in 1967 was designed to teach all subjects, including English, with respect to the students' native languages and provide access to learning through a language the child could readily understand. While the effects of that effort have been debated continuously ever since, it cannot be denied that it was a positive recognition that some federal

actions of the past had senselessly damaged or destroyed valuable languages and cultures. Bilingual education was aimed at using those languages that were left as a means of teaching the skills that were needed for success in white as well as native civilization.

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Chapter 8

The Age of Bilingual Education

In 1959, the newly constituted state of Alaska inherited a dual system of public education. For more than fifty years, the federal government – first under the Bureau of Education and then the Bureau of Indian Affairs – had run the schools for Native children in rural areas while the territory administered a separate system for the larger communities. U.S. Congress established the territorial system in 1905 in response to the growing population of non-Native miners and settlers who did not want their children to receive the same education that was offered to Eskimos, Indians and Aleuts. Territorial schools came under the supervision of the federally appointed governor of Alaska and were designated in law for the benefit of "white children and children of mixed blood who lead a civilized life."[1]

This dual system was not only fundamentally unequal, discriminatory and segregationist, but also clearly illegal under the new Alaska Constitution. That document changed the mandate of public education in Alaska by directing the Legislature to "establish and maintain a system of public schools open to all children of the state."[2]

Educators and politicians across the state recognized the need to create a unified and coordinated system of quality education to serve all citizens equally. The problem for the new state was paying for it. In 1961 the Alaska State Board of Education reported to the governor that education should be recognized as a state, rather than a federal or local, responsibility.[3] The board recommended the gradual reduction of BIA's role in rural Alaska education and decided that the long-term goal should be inclusion of all schools in the state system. For the short-term, federal help was needed for economic as well as educational reasons. Its report concluded that "in Alaska, where the economy is only partially developed, ... participation by the federal government is necessary and proper. Moreover ... the special education needs of Native children require the know-how of the experienced BIA staff ."[4]

The BIA agreed, and in 1962 a special Memorandum of Understanding between that federal agency and the state of Alaska outlined the mutual goal of establishing a single system of education under the control of the state. The memorandum required the BIA to continue to serve educational needs where the state could not because of a lack of finances.[5]

Concurrent with this shift from federal to state control was a move away from the philosophy of forced acculturation and assimilation of Natives into mainstream white society. By the late 1950s, many educators advocated a new approach based on a curriculum relevant to life in rural Alaska. Charles Ray of the University of

Alaska Education Department recommended extending the school year so that camping and work settings could be used as outdoor classrooms. He also advised schools to develop special materials that would allow them to teach English as a second language[6] rather than forcing children to speak it as the primary and compulsory language.

In forming a unified system of education that would provide high standards of learning for every child, the new state rejected the philosophy and practices of the past. A report issued by the Alaska Department of Education in 1967 declared

> The village culture, traditions and languages are not handicaps or deficiencies. They become so when an attempt is made to change the people to another set of values, another language, or another tradition. As long as the program refers to the Alaskan villager as being deficient or handicapped, the potential of the program is unnecessarily placing limits on its own effectiveness. The person has long, frequently and consistently been told that he is defective, imperfect, inadequate, and inferior. ... The negative approach has not been effective.[7]

The same report emphasized the need for all children to speak, read and write the English language, but it recommended that English be taught as a second language for minority cultures.[8]

The early 1960s also saw the beginning of native language instruction at the University of Alaska. Linguistics professor Michael Krauss, Irene Reed, and Martha Teeluk, a native speaker of Central Yup'ik Eskimo, together organized the first course for students in 1961. They chose Central Yup'ik, the language spoken in Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta area of southwestern Alaska, for this initial teaching program because it was the most active native language in the state. This language instruction program, which continues at the university to the present day, was to play a key role in the development of bilingual education in Alaska.

Early Movement Toward Title VII

Within the Bureau of Indian Affairs, attitudes changed slowly, but by the 1960s some bureaucrats called for innovation in Indian education and openly referred to the "stodgy concepts, antiquated practices and pinchpenny financial support"[9] of the past. Annual reports by Commissioner of Indian Affairs Philleo Nash mentioned efforts aimed at maintaining special programs for teaching English as a second language to Indian children who came to school speaking only or primarily their native language. In 1962 the bureau issued a report entitled *Doorway Toward the Light,* which outlined modern education initiatives that selected Navajo schools had practiced for the previous sixteen years. Based on the primary goals of preparing Navajo children to live effectively in non-Navajo society, use standard English, and practice a marketable vocational skill, the

program sought to educate without also causing disintegration and destruction of students' familiar culture. Instruction was in both Navajo and English. The report stated that "the pupil was accepted exactly as he was at the time," and added that "the native culture was not demeaned but was built onto. Use of the native tongue among pupils was not discouraged, as it had sometimes been in an earlier era of Indian education."[10] Teachers in the program continually stressed the need for strong skills in English as the language of the workplace, but they also recognized that a smooth transition to the modern economy was best accomplished with patience and respect for the students' familiar language and culture.

In 1963 Commissioner Nash wrote about the importance of educating BIA teachers in the cultural and language backgrounds of the people they were teaching.[11] By the mid-1960s, bureaucrats at the agency's highest levels expressed at least a theoretical acceptance of the concept of bilingual education, while at the same time publications issued by the department reflected a view of the rural Alaska village economy as a thing of the past. The goal was to offer education as an opportunity for Alaska Natives to escape from a life of certain poverty and make the necessary transition to the modern economy and society. A teacher handbook written by the BIA Juneau office in 1965 suggested that the demands of modern society require all students to finish high school and receive some further training in a trade or profession. "Anything less than this," the handbook noted, "relegates the learner to the live-off-the-land economy, which soon could descend

to living-off-a-welfare-check."[12] The handbook told teachers to expect a "culture of poverty" in Alaska Native villages, and that they would therefore find "poor conditions for nutrition, sleep and study (and) lack of stimulating and broadening experiences." The BIA program emphasized English proficiency as the first step in a successful education, but it directed that use of native languages could not be forbidden. The handbook for teachers cited studies showing that bilingual teaching accelerated acquisition of English.[13]

The means for reaching this goal of English proficiency was summed up in a paper prepared in 1964 by the national chief of the BIA Branch of Education, Hildegard Thompson. It cited statistics showing that still in that year most of the nation's Native American school-aged children came from homes in which the native language was the primary language spoken.[14] The challenge as Thompson saw it was to teach these children to think as well as speak in the English language while at the same time allowing them to retain enough of their own heritage to provide a secure identity. This "free access back and forth between cultures" enabled Native children to regain much of what they lost during the period when the government's policy was one of suppression of Native American language and culture. Looking back at that period, Thompson observed that immeasurable intellectual and psychological damage was done by blocking students' learning in both their own language and in English. As a result, she argued, many Native Americans grew to adulthood unable to think effectively in either language. "We

dare not repeat these errors of the past. We must keep the language doors open to Indian thought, and at the same time we must find ways to teach Indian youth to think in English. We must aim at proficiency in both languages."[15]

This recognition of the rights and values inherent in minority cultures was part of the civil rights movement that swept the United States and much of the world in the 1950s and 1960s. Congress passed the Civil Rights Act in 1964 and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in 1965. In January 1968 Congress amended the 1965 legislation by adding Title VII, the Bilingual Education Act, which officially declared a major shift in federal Indian policy. For the first time ever, Congress had written laws recognizing the value of minority languages and the special educational needs of students whose first language was other than English. Title VII provided funds not only to establish school-based bilingual programs but also to assure that schools taught the history and culture of the minority groups involved in the programs, thereby affirming the close connection between language and culture.

Breaking Through in Alaska

At the highest levels in Washington, the federal government moved to put bilingual education policy into practice for Native Americans, but these programs focused more on teaching children to make the transition to English than on helping them maintain their native languages. The BIA stressed pride in native

heritage as the foundation of effective learning for all minorities, and as a way of improving teachers' understanding of community needs it strongly encouraged teachers to learn the language spoken by their students. Educators viewed proficiency in English as a requirement for life and economic mobility in modern America, but they taught English as a second language and not as an immediate total replacement for the native language. Commissioner of Indian Affairs Robert L. Bennett proclaimed in 1968 that "Preservation of the Indian language is now basic BIA educational policy."[16] The Department of the Interior published studies by educators who concluded that English must be considered a foreign element to be mastered by Native children before they can move on to other academic areas. One researcher wrote that when the classroom teacher spoke the children's native language the obstruction of that foreign element could easily be overcome. Even when the teacher did not speak fluently and used the language only intermittently, the children felt much more comfortable, and "a rapport is established which is conducive to security and learning." She added that "acquisition of English is a prerequisite within the United States for higher education, and for social and economic mobility."[17]

Native leaders in Alaska agreed, calling for a school system that would give rural students a modern education in a setting that respected the value of native language and culture. Willie Hensley of Kotzebue, testifying at a hearing conducted in Fairbanks by a special U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Indian

Education in April, 1969, before senators Ted Kennedy, Walter Mondale, and Ted Stevens, stated that the schools should teach dignity and the fact that village children are not inferior to anyone. Emil Notti, president of the Alaska Federation of Natives, told the subcommittee that the goal of rural schools should be to give Native children the best education possible so that they would be able to decide for themselves whether they wanted to stay in the village or move to the city. Margaret Nick, a teacher from Bethel, testified further on the need to teach students to be proud of who they are. "If my children are proud," she said, "if my children have identity, if my children know who they are and they're proud to be who they are, they'll be able to encounter anything in life. ... This is why it's a must that we include our history and our culture in our schools before we lose it all."[18]

Still, the senators expressed frustration at the slow pace at which such needed reforms were reaching the classroom level in rural Alaska. Mondale stated that in his travels around the state he had seen no evidence of bilingual programs, the benefits of which "are so obvious that one wonders why we would meet in 1969 and have to discuss them any longer." Mondale called for increased local parental and community control of the schools and said that a situation in which children start school with no understanding of English while their teachers have no interest in learning or teaching the native language "is a guaranteed formula for human wreckage." He cited the example of a Navajo community that had taken control of its children's education, produced its own bilingual materials, and had achieved

positive results through a curriculum that was sensitive to traditional language and culture.[19]

Michael Krauss expressed frustration at the lack of any such sensitivity and understanding among educators in Alaska, and he suggested to the subcommittee that resistance to bilingual programs grew out of a fear that the teacher, the "father figure," would lose control of the schoolroom. A class full of 6-year-olds who spoke only a strange language was, he observed, "frightening to the white teacher who has gone to the village and is isolated among these people that he may respect ... or may consider unwashed savages anyway." Krauss recounted the difficulty he had experienced in persuading the Alaska Department of Education to support a grant application for a pilot elementary school bilingual program. Funds were available, but the federal granting agency required state approval and the state Department of Education had refused to give it. Arthur Hippler, a researcher and social scientist who had worked with Krauss on the grant proposal, suggested two reasons for the state's refusal: First, there were people within the state Department of Education who did not accept the idea that literacy in the native language aids proficiency in learning English and, second, some of these same people were concerned that bilingual programs would weaken teachers' power in the classroom and their control over students.[20]

Meanwhile, observers on the national level reported similar resistance to change within the federal system of Indian education. The authors of one study

observed that even though official BIA policy encouraged bilingual education for Indian students and many innovative programs existed at both the elementary and secondary levels, classroom practices in most schools across the nation still required children to study and respond exclusively in English. The study concluded that even though native languages at the time were "no longer being stamped out as a matter of official policy," many teachers throughout the system were unconvinced of the need for bilingual programs and remained committed to English-only policies as well as to "an implicit melting-pot philosophy."[21]

But attitudes across the state of Alaska were soon to start changing. An education conference held in Montreal in August, 1969, sponsored by the Arctic Institute of North America and the University of Alaska, brought heightened attention to the need for reform in language education. Officials from the Alaska Department of Education and the BIA in Alaska attended the conference and heard educators from seven circumpolar nations speak of the advances their countries had made in native language learning. Soviet Minister of Education Alexandre Danilov, for example, reported that northern students in his country master reading, writing, and speaking skills only when they are taught in their native languages. Furthermore, Danilov said, mastery of the native language makes learning Russian easier for students and therefore aids their transition to secondary education and study of the sciences.[22] Educators from Greenland, Canada, and the Scandinavian countries offered similar testimony. A teacher who had developed native language

curriculum material for a Saami school in northern Norway explained that since 1963 authorities in her country had recognized that "it was impossible for harmonic development and effective learning to take place without being connected to Lapp [Saami] language and culture."[23]

Even though bilingual teaching in Alaska lagged behind other northern nations and behind other Native schools in the United States, linguists had been working with native speakers at the University of Alaska intermittently since 1961 to develop teaching methods and curriculum materials in Yup'ik Eskimo. A key to that development was the introduction of a standard practical writing system for the language designed by Paschal Afcan, Irene Reed, Osahito Miyaoka, and Michael Krauss. The Eskimo Language Workshop, an advanced Yup'ik class taught at the university by Irene Reed, worked during the 1969-70 academic year to produce books intended to introduce literacy in Yup'ik to children in southwestern Alaska where many entered school with no knowledge of English. Materials included collections of traditional Eskimo stories and adaptations of works such as "Peter and the Wolf" and others from Western literature.

A Pilot Program

This background and the persuasive efforts of Reed and others involved in Yup'ik language study at the university began to have their effects on state and federal policy makers. At a two-day bilingual education conference at the

University of Alaska in November, 1969, BIA Area Education Director Warren Tiffany explained that the bureau was investigating the feasibility of initiating a bilingual program in its Alaska schools. In response, Reed presented to BIA officials a concrete plan for bilingual teaching programs in the Yup'ik area. She explained the practical writing system that had been developed at the university and revealed how the system could make students aware of the letters, sounds, and grammatical structure of their own language and how such awareness has a "transfer effect," aiding the acquisition of English. The process of connecting the written and spoken word in Yup'ik, Reed told BIA educators, makes it much easier for the student to comprehend English, even though the two languages "are structurally quite different."

Jean Harlow, representing the Alaska Department of Education, said that the "unfortunate" past practice of punishing children for speaking their native language had caused children to lose respect for themselves and their culture. "Schools should encourage the ability to understand and speak two languages," Harlow continued. "Mastery of two languages and cultures makes learning a third, and adjusting to changes and new conditions considerably easier."

At the conclusion of the conference, Tiffany and other BIA officials agreed with the theories behind bilingual education, and they took steps to put those theories into practice. Their summary stated that the amount and quality of

background material had convinced them of the need to initiate a pilot bilingual / bicultural program in three Yup'ik area schools in September, 1970.[24]

Subsequently, the state school system and the BIA agreed to experimental bilingual education programs in four communities – BIA Schools in Akiachak, Napakiak, and Nunapitchuk, and the State Operated School in Bethel – for the 1970-71 school year. The state and the BIA added nine more Yup'ik schools in 1971-72 and four more the next year.[25] By 1975, educational researcher James Orvik at the University of Alaska was able to define bilingual education as "a permanent force in rural Alaska."[26]

New policies written in 1970 by state and federal agencies reflected this increased awareness of the need for bilingualism. In Alaska that year a special governor's commission on education recommended that all teachers in the state be taught methods of teaching English as a second language.[27] The Alaska Department of Education looked at high drop-out rates and poor academic achievement among Natives and blamed the decades-long policy of language suppression. The department cited test results showing that students learned all subjects, including English, better in a bilingual than in an English-only program. Also, the department said, in a bilingual program "a more positive attitude is developed toward both languages. The language of the school is not set in opposition to the language used at home."[28]

A handbook for bilingual teachers published by the Alaska Department of Education suggested that curriculum should be built around the language of the home. "The language a child uses ... in a very deep sense *is* the child," the handbook said. "To reject his language ... is to reject him and those whom he most values."[29]

Meanwhile, the need for teacher training became increasingly apparent as researchers looked more deeply into the causes of village students' successes and failures. University of Alaska Education Professor Judith Kleinfeld in a study conducted both in all-Native boarding schools and in integrated urban schools during the 1970-71 school year concluded that white teachers who maintained a superior attitude and who spoke rapidly using big words in English generally found themselves teaching in a "silent classroom" as Native students viewed the teacher as uncaring and even hostile. It was "a classic pattern of mute withdrawal," Kleinfeld wrote. "Enclosing themselves in a protective shield of silence, students may sit in the classroom but refuse to meet the teacher's eyes, answer a question or ask for needed help." She added that "ethnocentric" teachers who were determined to indoctrinate Native students into the modern society and culture were being gradually replaced by those with more sophisticated and sensitive views, and the successful ones were able to create a climate of warmth and caring for both the individual student and his culture and background.[30]

This rapport with the Native students was combined with demands for achievement which the students perceived as an aspect of the teacher's personal concern. Kleinfeld quoted one successful high school teacher who said that it was necessary for her to give an extraordinary amount of personal attention to one Native boy with very limited abilities in English. He had reached high school only because previous teachers had allowed him to withdraw from activities by simply saying "I don't know" when he didn't understand the language of the classroom. This teacher was able to combine a warm caring attitude with firm demands. "I know it was hard for him to translate everything back and forth from Eskimo and easy for him to avoid the situation by saying 'I don't know,'" she wrote. "But we worked on it."[31]

State and Federal Laws

The success of the experimental bilingual programs in Yup'ik schools prompted activists in the movement to persuade the Alaska Legislature to write bilingual education provisions into state law. Gary Holthaus, director of the Bilingual Education Program for the state Department of Education, enlisted the support of key legislators, especially Senator Joe Josephson of Anchorage, who in 1972 sponsored a bill requiring that any state-operated school attended by fifteen or more students whose primary language is other than English must have at least one teacher who is fluent in the students' native language, and classroom materials

must be presented in the native language. The bill declared that past education practices had ignored and belittled languages other than English and that the absence of bilingual programs was one reason for below-standard achievement in Alaska Native students. Also on Holthaus's advice, Josephson introduced a measure providing for the establishment of an Alaska Native Language Center at the University of Alaska for the purposes of studying Alaska languages, developing curriculum materials, and training bilingual teachers and aides. After an extensive lobbying and letter-writing campaign by students and educators at all levels, the 1972 Legislature approved both bills and on July 6 Governor William Egan signed them into law. The Legislature also appropriated $200,000 for a bilingual education fund and another $200,000 to establish the Alaska Native Language Center and implement its program.[32]

At the federal level, the Department of Health, Education and Welfare directed school districts to accommodate the needs of students whose first language was other than English. In 1974 the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in Lau v. Nichols that under the Civil Rights Act of 1964 failure of a public school district to provide special instructional opportunities to children who did not speak English was a denial of an equal opportunity to a meaningful education. Merely supplying facilities and books and teachers for non-English speaking students was not enough, the Supreme Court ruled, because anyone who did not understand the language was automatically denied the opportunity to participate in classroom

activities. Writing the majority opinion for the court, Justice William O. Douglas declared that denial of those opportunities violated the provisions of the Civil Rights Act which banned discrimination based on race, color, or national origin. "Basic English skills are at the very core of what these public schools teach," according to Douglas, and laws requiring that students have those skills before they can participate "is to make a mockery of public education." Then, in a statement that summed up several generations of English-only schooling for many Native Americans, Douglas added, "We know that those who do not understand English are certain to find their classroom experiences wholly incomprehensible and in no way meaningful."[33]

The Lau decision along with the Education Amendments passed by Congress in 1974, making it illegal for states to deny equal access to education by failing to overcome language barriers, had a significant impact in Alaska. That same year the state Legislature enacted a law ordering all schools that had at least eight students with limited ability to speak English to provide a bilingual program.[34] Many Alaska Natives at the time saw these moves as positive steps toward preserving not just their languages, but aspects of their varied cultures as well. Vera Kaneshiro, for example, spoke of the need for using a child's first language as a way of improving his access to learning. Addressing a statewide bilingual-bicultural conference in 1976, Kaneshiro, a native speaker of Siberian Yupik, stated that she was grateful that after generations of English-only policies, the schools were

finally taking steps to include the native language and culture. She observed that knowledge of English was invaluable to Alaska Natives for the doors it opened in modern society, but that use of English should not diminish the need of Native people to retain their own language. She said that bilingual education gave Natives the chance to function well in both the traditional and the modern worlds while at the same time it provided all Alaskans with the opportunity to broaden their understanding of one another. "God made us what we are," she said. "Why should we change ourselves to something we are not? We have an origin and we have been given talent. Let us put that talent to work and progress from there, continuing to be who we are."[35]

Bilingual Education in Practice

As school districts put bilingual education into practice across the state, however, the trend was always toward transitional programs aimed more at moving the child completely away from the native language and into English than at developing fluency in both languages. Native language and culture received little support, and the goal in most schools was to prepare children to study all subjects entirely in English by the third or fourth grade. It soon became apparent that transitional bilingual education in the schools was ineffective on its own as a means of stopping the loss of Alaska native languages. By the late 1980s, only two Alaska native languages – Central Alaskan Yup'ik in some villages in that

language area, and Siberian Yupik on St. Lawrence Island – remained as the primary language of the home and the first language learned by children. This was significantly lower than the number published by the Alaska Department of Education in 1970. That year the department surveyed 175 rural schools, asking the language habits of first-year students in the classroom, on the playground, and by their parents in the home. Ninety-six schools responded, representing a sampling of 841 entering primary students in rural Alaska. The combined numbers showed that in the classroom 38.5 percent spoke either no English or English in less than complete sentences; on the playground 40 percent were either monolingual in the native language or bilingual in the native language and English; and of the parents at home, 60 percent were either monolingual in the native language or bilingual.[36]

Such a dramatic drop in numbers during the first twenty years of bilingual programs did not escape the attention of educators and researchers. Judith Kleinfeld noted in 1992 that the question of how well the public school system was equipped to provide children with a Native education still had not been resolved. Some parents and educators believed that bilingual/bicultural programs fit in well with Western schooling, while others viewed the schools themselves as not only destructive to Native values, but also a source of identity confusion in young people. The efforts to introduce native languages and culture had "not proved satisfying," Kleinfeld wrote. The small number of native speakers of the languages,

the difficulty of developing curriculum materials, and insufficient staff development all contributed to the disappointing results.[37]

Roy Iutzi-Mitchell is another educator who criticized traditional bilingual programs in the early 1990s, charging that even the best of them often contributed inadvertently to native language death. He pointed out that bilingual programs had created false hopes among parents and communities that the schools would revive the languages and teach the children to speak them. In reality, Iutzi-Mitchell wrote, bilingual programs typically only provided "instruction *in* English *about* the native language." Moreover, teachers who used the native language in the bilingual classroom but English everywhere else within and outside the school were inadvertently sending the message that the native language was not appropriate in the everyday world. Iutzi-Mitchell suggested that bilingual programs were inadequate if they served only to teach the language to young people while the Native population as a whole failed to address the fundamental question of why communities have chosen to adopt English as the language of business, education, and politics. Simply teaching the language will not assure its use outside the school.[38]

Anthropologist Phyllis Morrow of the University of Alaska has concluded that bilingual/bicultural programs practiced in rural schools may damage Native students' self-identity if those programs attempt to teach local culture in ways that are alien to local standards and traditions. In some cases, aboriginal culture

becomes a valid subject of study only when it is parsed into "chunks" that fit into categories – math, music, physical education, language – as they are defined by the standards of modern American schooling. Morrow concluded that such "ethnocentrism" has already proved harmful, resulting in the argument that schools should teach only those native traditions that are valuable to modern life. "The Native language itself is treated as technique," she said. "The focus is on grammar, vocabulary, orthography and translation skills taught by drills and worksheets. ... Redefining one culture in terms of another can not result in culturally appropriate education."[39] Rather than forcing cultural change through external forces, the schools should be encouraging local people to make their own educational choices based on interaction with one another.

Other researchers had recognized inadequacies in traditional bilingual programs as early as 1980. Michael Krauss, director of the Alaska Native Language Center, was one who warned that the schools alone could not be relied upon as the savior of native languages because language simply cannot be transmitted from teachers to students in the natural way that it is passed on from parents to children in the home. Furthermore, bilingual programs in the schools could do more harm than good if parents came to depend on them as a way of relieving themselves of the burden of passing on their linguistic heritage to their children. "Those who claim that the school can save the language and that therefore the parents do not have the responsibility to talk it to their children are

fooling themselves," Krauss wrote. "Parents must not expect this and the schools must not claim it."[40]

Krauss acknowledged in a paper written in 1996 that he had been optimistic twenty-four years before in believing that the beginning of bilingual education had come just in time to save some Alaska native languages. He added ironically that several languages that were spoken by children in isolated villages in 1972 were not spoken by children in the same villages in 1996.[41] Bilingual education had possibly slowed the rate of decline but had clearly failed to stop it.[42] In retrospect, it is apparent that by the time bilingual education programs got started in the early 1970s, it was already too late to save the languages. By then in most Alaska villages, English had become the favored language of the home and children were learning it as their primary means of communication.

Congressional Action in the 1990s

The trend toward extinction was undeniable, and in a major study completed in 1991, the U.S. Department of Education acknowledged the damaging effects of the loss of native languages and cultures. The Indian Nations at Risk Task Force, chaired by former Alaska Commissioner of Education William Demmert and former U.S. Secretary of Education Terrel Bell, concluded that federal education policies of the past had weakened the resolve of Native Americans to retain their traditional languages. The task force said that if the federal government did not

immediately attend to the physical, mental, and spiritual health of Natives, social problems such as alcoholism, suicide, and loss of purpose would only grow worse. "Language and culture are inextricably linked because one supports the other," the task force's concluding report decided. "The ability to speak and learn from the elders, the music and art forms, the historical and practical knowledge, and the traditional social and cultural practices must not be lost to tribes and the nation as a whole."[43]

The report stated in the strongest possible terms that language competence was fundamental to learning and that standard English was essential to success in school. In addition, "schools that respect and support a student's language and culture are significantly more successful in educating those students." The task force recommended that schools take on the job of promoting and teaching students' tribal languages along with instruction in standard English. At the same time, however, it recognized the school system's inherent limitations in that area and charged parents with the responsibility of "being your children's first and most important teacher, especially in the development of their language base." Overall, the task force concluded that effective education for Native Americans required a working combination of schools, parents, communities, and tribes.[44]

In response to public pressure Congress, with the sponsorship of Senator Daniel Inouye of Hawaii, passed the Native American Languages Act of 1990. In reversing two hundred years of federal policy, Congress declared that the history of

suppression and extermination directed at Native American languages had been unnecessarily destructive. The act recognized that academic achievement was tied directly to respect for the first language of the student, and that native languages were "critical to the survival of cultural and political integrity of any people." Suddenly and finally, there was support at the highest level of government for the rights of Native Americans to maintain and promote their languages and to use them as a medium of instruction in schools funded by the federal government.[45] This went beyond the scope of the bilingual statutes written twenty years before. The 1990 act was designed for maintenance and perpetuation of the native languages, not as a tool for effecting a transition into English. It was explicit in its repudiation of past policies which "often resulted in acts of suppression and extermination of Native American languages and cultures."[46]

Following this legislation, Alaska Senator Frank Murkowski introduced the Alaska Native Languages Preservation and Enhancement Act of 1991. Murkowski held a hearing in Anchorage in October of that year to take testimony from Alaskans on his bill. In an introductory statement, the senator stated that the proposed legislation was based on the assumption that language was a significant part of the "social order of the people." He referred to past federal policy as "misguided" in its attempt to force Alaska Natives to give up their languages and cultures "under the mandate that English was the only language." This sense of loss had damaged the vital connection to cultural roots and values, leading also to a loss

of moral guidance. His intent was to help bring back the languages as a source of the integrity and pride of the Alaska Native people.[47]

Murkowski's proposed legislation eventually became part of the broader Native American Languages Act of 1992, sponsored principally by Senator Daniel Inouye who explained that his purpose was to provide support for the Native American Languages Act of 1990. Even though that previous legislation was significant in its repudiation of past policies, it was merely a statement of intent and provided no funding for programs that would help document and preserve those native languages still spoken in the United States. With the passage of the 1992 act, Congress established a grant program intended to make money available to tribal groups in order to help them develop ways of transmitting language skills from the older to the younger generations. The act authorized the Administration for Native Americans to fund programs for language training, development of learning materials, and purchase of computers and recording equipment.[48]

Speaking before Inouye's Senate Select Committee on Indian Affairs, which was considering the 1992 bill prior to its passage, Krauss outlined the endangered state of most of the world's minority languages and the consequent need for funds to protect those that still survived in the United States. He related the language situation to the current state of endangered species and the threat to the world's biodiversity, explaining that 20 to 50 percent of the 6,000 languages on Earth were no longer being spoken by children. Krauss said that the greatest reason to be

encouraged about this legislation was that it emphasized the role of the Native people themselves in maintaining their languages. He noted that the will to restore or preserve a language cannot be imposed from outside by linguists, educators, or politicians. "If the money has to be requested by the people themselves as an expression of their own inner determination to do something with their language," he concluded, "I believe that programs resulting from this bill will have more success than any other." [49]

Other speakers, including tribal and political leaders as well as linguists and educators, presented overwhelming testimony in favor of the bill. Inouye's fellow senator from Hawaii, Daniel Akaka, said that his state and its citizens had recognized that "the survival of Hawaiian culture depends on the preservation of the Hawaiian language."[50] Letters of support were sent by Native students from all over the nation. One example is from a boy who described himself as a Kickapoo Indian who was grateful to friends and teachers who had recently taught him some of his native language. "Because I could not speak my native language, I was often called an Apple, that is 'Red on the outside, White on the inside,'" he wrote. "This can no longer be said of me. I am well on my way to learning my language." He asked for passage of the bill so that other Indian children would have the same opportunities.[51]

With the legislation of the 1990s, Congress acknowledged the errors of its own past efforts to force Native Americans to set aside the defining characteristics

of their cultures. Now, with the linguistic heritage of Native Americans severely diminished, Congress was taking steps to revive what was left. The one consistency in two hundred years of federal policy as it applied to the languages spoken by America's indigenous people was its adherence to the idea that a common language creates a common bond and unity among people. For most of that history, that conviction served to justify efforts at forced assimilation of Natives into mainstream America. But a growing consciousness of respect in law for the rights of minorities and indigenous groups altered public opinion in regard to language. Americans still viewed it as the same unifying factor it always had been, but also it became a cultural treasure, as vital to the integrity of small groups as it was to greater American nationalism. New federal policy was based on the assumption that Native Americans could enjoy concurrently the cultural advantages of their own language and the social, economic, and political advantages of English. A nation unified by one language may also be enriched by the presence of many others.

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5. Alaska State Department of Education, *North to the Future: Alaska Department of Education and Education in Alaska 1785-1967* (Juneau, Alaska Department of Education, 1967), 138.
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9. L. Madison Coombs, *Doorway Toward the Light: The Story of the Special Navajo Education Program* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Branch of Education, 1962), 4.

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12. Eunice Logan and Dorothy Nadeau Johnson, *We Teach in Alaska* (Juneau: Bureau of Indian Affairs, 1965), 58.

13. Ibid., 64-67.

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31. Ibid., 31-32.

32. *Laws of Alaska, 1972*. Chapter 172, Chapter 173, Chapter 174, Chapter 175.

Gary Holthaus to Joe Josephson, April 11, 1972, copy in Alaska Native Language Center Library, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

33. *Lau v. Nichols*, 1974.

34. *Alaska Statutes*, 14.30.400. This law changed the 1972 legislation by reducing the required number of non-English speaking students from fifteen to eight.

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Chapter 9

Conclusion

The decline of Alaska native languages[1] occurred as families in every area of the territory and state recognized the benefits of English, made the constrained choice to adopt it as the primary language of the home, and thus interrupted the continuity of native language use from generation to generation. Language shift was part of Alaska Natives' adaptation to rapidly changing conditions in all aspects of life as Americans and their institutions of government, economy, and society pressed inexorably into the North. The federal government played a role in that complex process. Policies made in Washington had much to do with creating the environment that persuaded Alaska Natives to switch languages. Government policy defined the choices that were available. It fostered an economy of material wealth that made participation seem appealing to Alaska Natives and more attractive than the alternative, and it established political and legal systems that required anyone who wished to be heard to use the language of American government and law. Native people adopted English for the opportunities it afforded them in the world of jobs and material goods and for the access it provided them, as distinct minorities, to systems of politics and justice. Alaska

Natives made their own choices in a climate created and defined not by themselves but by the rapid growth of the American nation.

Alaska joined the United States during a period in which the federal government directed its attention toward destroying Native American culture, securing the continent for settlement, and creating a common culture out of a diversity of peoples. Americans viewed their own dominance on the continent as inevitable and unavoidable. Indians stood in the way of that destiny, and Americans believed that white civilization could never coexist with what they viewed as tribal barbarism. The spirit of reform and philanthropy, which traveled to Alaska with Christian missionary societies as well as agents of the federal government, called for a plan to Christianize and educate Native Americans as an alternative to the costly and destructive military campaigns that had taken place in the West. It was an era of fervent nationalism in a country that feared a loss of unity as Catholic and Jewish immigrants from the nations of southern and eastern Europe threatened American Anglo-Protestant dominance. The country sought conformity over multiculturalism, promoted the perceived unifying powers of a common language over bilingualism, and expected Native Americans as well as immigrants to assimilate. Federal politicians and bureaucrats were products of their time. They represented a society that assumed that members of every "primitive" aboriginal culture would aspire to a "higher" level of civilization once they were presented with the opportunity to learn. The America of the 1880s and 1890s

worked to weed out cultural pluralism and linguistic diversity while also nurturing homogeneity.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, however, policy makers at the highest levels of government were forced to admit the failure of federal efforts over the previous forty years to achieve the goal of total assimilation. Native Americans had, for the most part, refused to shed the customs and characteristics that defined them as distinct groups of people within the larger nation even though many had accepted Christianity and the English language. Complete cultural transformation could not be attained in a single generation and, ironic as it must have seemed to missionaries and government policy makers at the time, Native Americans' acceptance of the religion and language of American civilization did not guarantee their entrance into the social or economic mainstream, as the nation remained segregated along racial lines.

Still, the new language offered advantages to Alaska Natives, and their switch to English cannot, therefore, be seen as the result of an overwhelming government that imposed its policies on a defeated population. The history of language loss reveals that bureaucracies dedicated to achieving civilization and assimilation by force were ineffective and even counterproductive. English for Alaska Natives was instead a response to changing conditions. Families and communities in essence accepted it – even long before the rhetoric of minority rights and identity politics came into use – as a tool they needed in the effort to promote Native issues,

preserve elements of their culture, and take advantage of the material goods offered through the modern economy. Native culture is resilient and adaptable, and individuals often accepted the elements of the modern world that allowed them to survive and remain Native.

Forcible language suppression, which existed until well into the 1960s in schoolrooms operated by the federal government, produced horrendous effects – including fear, shame, and rebellion – in countless individual Natives of several generations. The federal government itself eventually admitted that as a method for teaching English it produced inadequate results along with resistance to learning among students. Overall, while the federal government's overt attempts to force Alaska Natives to abandon their languages and become monolingual speakers of English had grave negative effects on individuals and the languages themselves, it was positive social, economic, and political advantage more than any specific anti-language government policy that pressured families and communities to make the switch. The shift to English was assured when pressure in the home favored it as the primary means of communication.

However, one less positive reason for the shift does exist. While it is true that all languages are equal in their ability to facilitate communication, the history of Alaska Native language loss has shown that languages are certainly not all equal in the political or social sense. English became the common language in Alaska not because of its linguistic superiority but because it was accepted as more practical,

efficient, and prestigious than the diversity of native languages that preceded it. Linguist Patricia Kwachka pointed out in her analysis of the dialects of English spoken in the Koyukon Athabaskan area that "the evaluation of one dialect as 'better' is a social judgment, not a linguistic one," and because social judgments are more powerful than linguistic ones, Alaska Natives in many cases came to accept that their way of speaking was inadequate.[2]

The nineteen Alaska villages where children still speak a native language as the first language of the home are isolated in small pockets on the lower Kuskokwim River, on the state's southwestern Bering Sea coast, and on St. Lawrence Island. These are the remaining holdouts in which most families have so far resisted abandonment of the native language even though the children also learn English. The languages persist in lower Kuskokwim villages and the southwestern coastal villages because of a combination of three factors – early dedication to linguistic research by missionaries, a relative lack of the resources that attracted outsiders to other parts of Alaska, and a comparatively large number of native language speakers. These factors existed in other areas of the territory as well, but nowhere else in such combination.

The Russian Orthodox, Moravian, and Jesuit Catholic groups that settled in Southwestern Alaska had an immediate impact on religious traditions and established a pattern of literacy in the native languages that became the basis of learning both inside and outside the church. The first influential non-Natives with

whom the Yup'ik people of the area came into contact encouraged the preservation of the language and worked under the premise that people learn best when they are taught in a language they readily understand. Secondly, the area is not rich in mineral deposits, timber resources, or commercial quantities of fur-bearing marine mammals such as sea otter or fur seal. Natural resources are sufficient to sustain a healthy local subsistence economy but are not found in the amounts necessary to have drawn large numbers of early explorers and permanent settlers from outside. Finally, the size of the Central Yup'ik language area and the large number of speakers in villages clustered in close proximity to one another contributed to the preservation of the language. People have been able to travel to nearby villages, socialize, intermarry, and continue traditional hunting and fishing practices while at the same time communicating in a familiar common language.

On St. Lawrence Island, where the Siberian Yupik language is still viable in Gambell and Savoonga, the people are able to communicate in the native language not only with residents of the neighboring village, but also with relatives who speak the same language on the eastern coast of Siberia across the Bering Strait. The isolation of the Bering Sea island, combined with a lack of the resources that brought large numbers of outsiders to settle in other parts of Alaska, has contributed to the strength of the language. At the same time, however, the fur, fish, and game resources have been plentiful enough to support a traditional subsistence lifestyle, so that people have not been forced to leave the village in

order to support themselves. Furthermore, since St. Lawrence Island Eskimos speak Siberian Yupik and English, and their nearest neighbors across the strait speak Siberian Yupik and Russian, the native language is the only common means of communication.

In short, even though the English language with all its power and prestige has been a force in these nineteen villages for as long as it has in the rest of Alaska, the people have so far preserved the native languages in their homes because geographic isolation, clustered enclaves of speakers, lack of commercial quantities of natural resources, and ample supplies of subsistence resources have allowed people to stay together and earn their living in a place where they can speak their own language every day.

But regardless of the reasons for which languages were undermined in the past, Alaska Natives still point to them as primary sources of cultural identity. William Charles Brower noted in his study of Inupiaq Eskimo language and culture that when schools foster the use of the native language along with English, Native people "feel a renewed sense of pride in their Native identity." He added that "a portion of their ethnicity and positive feelings about themselves includes preserving Inupiaq as a spoken language."[3]

The schools alone are not responsible for the loss of Alaska native languages. If languages diminished as a result of the loss of continuity from generation to generation, then they can be made vital again only when that continuity is restored

in the home and community. The history of the issue suggests that Natives continually have chosen their own ways of adapting to the forces of change. English was a necessary part of that process of adaptation, but unfortunately adoption of the new language too often also meant abandonment of the old. It is unfortunate as well that the realization within government that native languages are cultural assets with immeasurable intrinsic value came only after a long period of decline and loss.

Hope for the future of Alaska native languages lies in the people's ability to use modern systems of education and technology as the means for retaining language as an expression of their traditional culture. The electronic age has done much to hasten the decline of native languages, but television and computers can, if employed properly, also be the most effective teaching tools ever invented. Since 1972, the Alaska Native Language Center at the University of Alaska Fairbanks has worked to document all twenty native languages spoken in the state. It continues to develop curriculum materials for use in the schools, train teachers, and document as much as possible of the languages while speakers still survive. The dictionaries, grammars, and narrative story collections published today are the record upon which future generations will base their study of Alaska native languages as expressions of cultural distinction. The decline of those languages since 1867 is closely connected to the workings of American education, politics, law, and technology. Native language viability today depends on how effectively

Alaska Natives are able to use those same systems to their own advantage and through them provide opportunities for grandparents and parents to pass on a linguistic heritage to their children.

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1. The following statistics on the number of living speakers of each of the Alaska native languages come from Michael Krauss in his paper "Status of Northern Languages," presented at the Dartmouth Endangered Languages Conference in 1995. Inupiaq, 13,500 people and 3,100 speakers; Alutiiq, 3,000 people and 400 speakers; Central Alaskan Yup'ik, 21,000 people and 10,000 speakers; Central Siberian Yupik, 1,100 people and 1,000 speakers; Aleut, 2,000 people and 300 speakers; Gwich'in, 1,100 people and 300 speakers; Han, 50 people and 8 speakers; Upper Tanana, 300 people and 105 speakers; Tanacross, 220 people and 65 speakers; Tanana, 380 people and 30 speakers; Upper Kuskokwim, 160 people and 40 speakers; Koyukon, 2,300 people and 300 speakers; Holikachuk, 200 people and 12 speakers; Ingalik, 275 people and 40 speakers; Dena'ina, 900 people and 75 speakers; Ahtna, 500 people and 80 speakers; Eyak, 1 person and 1 speaker; Tlingit, 10,000 people and 500 speakers; Haida, 600 people and 15 speakers; Tsimshian, 1,300 people and 70 speakers. (These numbers are for Alaska only. Inupiaq, Central Siberian Yupik, Aleut, Gwich'in, Han, Upper Tanana, Tlingit, Haida, and Tsimshian have additional speakers in their language areas extending into other countries.)

2. Patricia Kwachka, *Oral and Written English of the Koyukon Athabaskan Area,* Apel Research Report Vol. IV (Fairbanks: Yukon-Koyukuk School District, 1988), 4.

3. William Charles Brower, "Language as a Component of Inupiat Ethnic Identity," *The Musk-Ox* 34 (Spring) (1986), 88-89.

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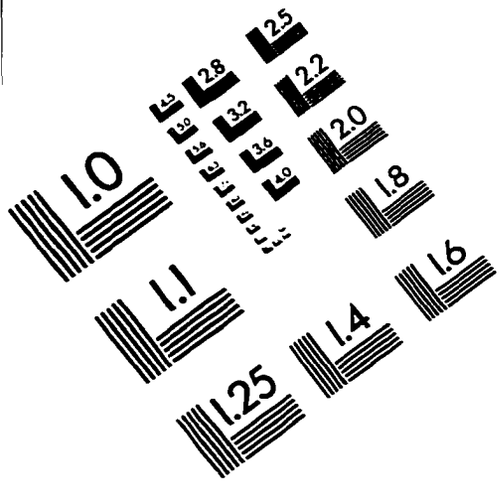

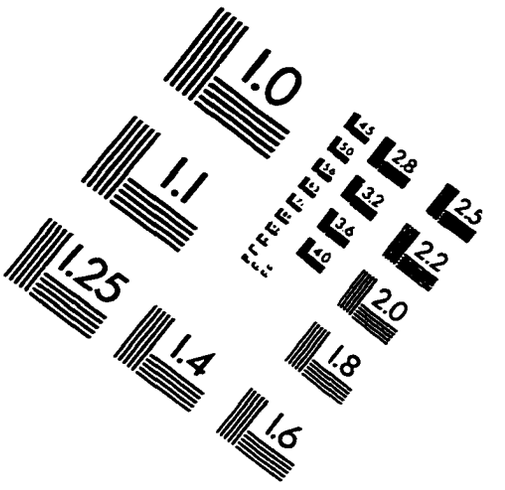

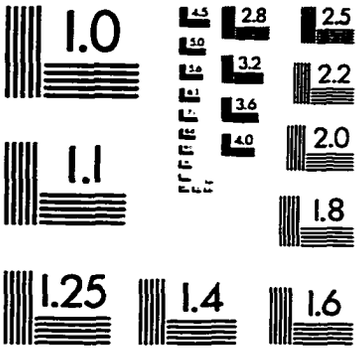

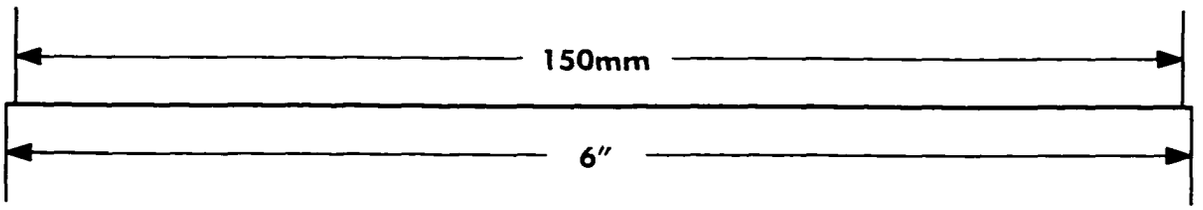

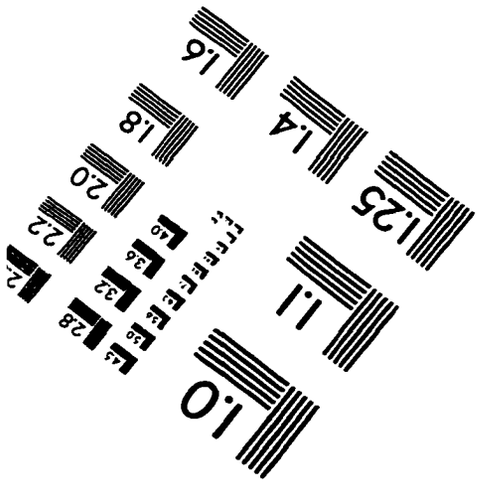

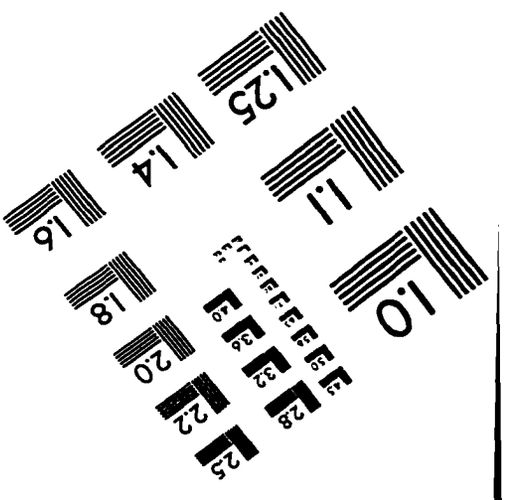

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